Expositions of Holy Scripture St John Ch. I to XIV

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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

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

ST. JOHN

Vols. I and II

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

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THE WORD IN ETERNITY, IN THE WORLD, AND IN THE FLESH

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word

was God. 2. The same was in the beginning with God. 3. All things were

made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. 4.

In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5. And the light

shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. 6. There was

a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7. The same came for a

witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might

believe. 8. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that

Light. 9. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh

into the world. 10. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him,

and the world knew Him not. 11. He came unto His own, and His own

received Him not. 12. But as many as received Him, to them gave He

power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name:

13. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of

the will of man, but of God. 14. 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.'--JOHN i. 1-14.

The other Gospels begin with Bethlehem; John begins with the bosom of

the Father.' Luke dates his narrative by Roman emperors and Jewish

high-priests; John dates his in the beginning.' To attempt adequate

exposition of these verses in our narrow limits is absurd; we can only

note the salient points of this, the profoundest page in the New

Testament.

The threefold utterance in verse 1 carries us into the depths of

eternity, before time or creatures were. Genesis and John both start

from the beginning,' but, while Genesis works downwards from that point

and tells what followed, John works upwards and tells what preceded--if

we may use that term in speaking of what lies beyond time. Time and

creatures came into being, and, when they began, the Word was.' Surely

no form of speech could more emphatically declare absolute, uncreated

being, outside the limits of time. Clearly, too, no interpretation of

these words fathoms their depth, or makes worthy sense, which does not

recognise that the Word is a person. The second clause of verse 1

asserts the eternal communion of the Word with God. The preposition

employed means accurately towards,' and expresses the thought that in

the Word there was motion or tendency towards, and not merely

association with, God. It points to reciprocal, conscious communion,

and the active going out of love in the direction of God. The last

clause asserts the community of essence, which is not inconsistent with

distinction of persons, and makes the communion of active Love

possible; for none could, in the depths of eternity, dwell with and

perfectly love and be loved by God, except one who Himself was God.

Verse 1 stands apart as revealing the pretemporal and essential nature

of the Word. In it the deep ocean of the divine nature is partially

disclosed, though no created eye can either plunge to discern its

depths or travel beyond our horizon to its boundless, shoreless extent.

The remainder of the passage deals with the majestic march of the

self-revealing Word through creation, and illumination of humanity, up

to the climax in the Incarnation.

John repeats the substance of verse 1 in verse 2, apparently in order

to identify the Agent of creation with the august person whom he has

disclosed as filling eternity. By Him creation was effected, and,

because He was what verse 1 has declared Him to be, therefore was it

effected by Him. Observe the three steps marked in three consecutive

verses. All things were made by Him'; literally became,' where the

emergence into existence of created things is strongly contrasted with

the divine was' of verse 1. Through Him' declares that the Word is the

agent of creation; without Him' (literally, apart from Him') declares

that created things continue in existence because He communicates it to

them. Man is the highest of these all things,' and verse 4 sets forth

the relation of the Word to Him, declaring that life,' in all the width

and height of its possible meanings, inheres in Him, and is

communicated by Him, with its distinguishing accompaniment, in human

nature, of light, whether of reason or of conscience.

So far, John has been speaking as from the upper or divine side, but in

verse 5 he speaks from the under or human, and shows us how the

self-revelation of the Word has, by some mysterious necessity, been

conflict. The darkness' was not made by Him, but it is there, and the

beams of the light have to contend with it. Something alien must have

come in, some catastrophe have happened, that the light should have to

stream into a region of darkness.

John takes the Fall' for granted, and in verse 5 describes the whole

condition of things, both within and beyond the region of special

revelation. The shining of the light is continuous, but the darkness is

obstinate. It is the tragedy and crime of the world that the darkness

will not have the light. It is the long-suffering mercy of God that the

light repelled is not extinguished, but shines meekly on.

Verses 6-13 deal with the historical appearance of the Word. The

Forerunner is introduced, as in the other Gospels; and, significantly

enough, this Evangelist calls him only John,'--omitting the Baptist,'

as was very natural to him, the other John, who would feel less need

for distinguishing the two than others did. The subordinate office of a

witness to the light is declared positively and negatively, and the

dignity of such a function is implied. To witness to the light, and to

be the means of leading men to believe, was honour for any man.

The limited office of the Forerunner serves as contrast to the

transcendent lustre of the true Light. The meaning of verse 9 may be

doubtful, but verses 10 and 11 clearly refer to the historical

manifestation of the Word, and probably verse 9 does so too. Possibly,

however, it rather points to the inner revelation by the Word, which is

the light of men.' In that case the phrase that cometh into the world'

would refer to every man,' whereas it is more natural in this context

to refer it to the light,' and to see in the verse a reference to the

illumination of humanity consequent on the appearance of Jesus Christ.

The use of world' and came' in verses 10 and 11 points in that

direction. Verse 9 represents the Word as coming'; verse 10 regards Him

as come--He was in the world.'

Note the three clauses, so like, and yet so unlike the august three in

verse 1. Note the sad issue of the coming--The world knew Him not.' In

that world' there was one place where He might have looked for

recognition, one set of people who might have been expected to hail

Him; but not only the wide world was blind (knew not') , but the

narrower circle of His own' fought against what they knew to be light

(received not') .

But the rejection was not universal, and John proceeds to develop the

blessed consequences of receiving the light. For the first time he

speaks the great word believe.' The act of faith is the condition or

means of receiving.' It is the opening of the mental eye for the light

to pour in. We possess Jesus in the measure of our faith. The object of

faith is His name,' which means, not this or that collocation of

letters by which He is designated, but His whole self-revelation. The

result of such faith is the right to become children of God,' for

through faith in the only-begotten Son we receive the communication of

a divine life which makes us, too, sons. That new life, with its

consequence of sonship, does not belong to human nature as received

from parents, but is a gift of God mediated through faith in the Light

who is the Word.

Verse 14 is not mere repetition of the preceding, but advances beyond

it in that it declares the wonder of the way by which that divine Word

did enter into the world. John here, as it were, draws back the

curtain, and shows us the transcendent miracle of divine love, for

which he has been preparing in all the preceding. Note that he has not

named the Word' since verse 1, but here he again uses the majestic

expression to bring out strongly the contrast between the ante-temporal

glory and the historical lowliness. These four words, The Word became

flesh,' are the foundation of all our knowledge of God, of man, of the

relations between them, the foundation of all our hopes, the guarantee

of all our peace, the pledge of all blessedness. He tabernacled among

us.' As the divine glory of old dwelt between the cherubim, so Jesus is

among men the true Temple, wherein we see a truer glory than that

radiant light which filled the closed chamber of the holy of holies.

Rapturous remembrances rose before the Apostle as he wrote, We beheld

His glory'; and he has told us what he has beheld and seen with his

eyes, that we also may have fellowship with him in beholding. The glory

that shone from the Incarnate Word was no menacing or dazzling light.

He and it were full of grace and truth,' perfect Love bending to

inferiors and sinners, with hands full of gifts and a heart full of

tenderness and the revelation of reality, both as regards God and man.

His grace bestows all that our lowness needs, His truth teaches all

that our ignorance requires. All our gifts and all our knowledge come

from the Incarnate Word, in whom believing we are the children of God.

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THE LIGHT AND THE LAMPS

He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that

Light.'--JOHN i. 8.

'He was a burning and a shining light; and ye were willing for a season

to rejoice in His light.'--JOHN v. 35.

My two texts both refer to John the Baptist. One of them is the

Evangelist's account of him, the other is our Lord's eulogium upon him.

The latter of my texts, as the Revised Version shows, would be more

properly rendered, He was a lamp' rather than He was a light,' and the

contrast between the two words, the light' and the lamps,' is my theme.

I gather all that I would desire to say into three points: that Light'

and its witnesses; the underived Light and the kindled lamps; the

undying Light and the lamps that go out.

I. First of all, then, the contrast suggested to us is between that

Light' and its witnesses.

John, in that profound prologue which is the deepest part of Scripture,

and lays firm and broad in the depths the foundation-stones of a

reasonable faith, draws the contrast between that Light' and them whose

business it was to bear witness to it. As for the former, I cannot here

venture to dilate upon the great, and to me absolutely satisfying and

fundamental, thoughts that lie in these eighteen first verses of this

Gospel. The Word was with God,' and that Word was the Agent of

Creation, the Fountain of Life, the Source of the Light which is

inseparable from all human life. John goes back, with the simplicity of

a child's speech, which yet is deeper than all philosophies, to a

Beginning, far anterior to the Beginning' of which Genesis speaks, and

declares that before creation that Light shone; and he looks out over

the whole world, and declares, that before and beyond the limits of the

historical manifestation of the Word in the flesh, its beams spread

over the whole race of man. But they are all focussed, if I may so

speak, and gathered to a point which burns as well as illuminates, in

the historical manifestation of Jesus Christ in the flesh. That was the

true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.'

Next, he turns to the highest honour and the most imperative duty laid,

not only upon mighty men and officials, but upon all on whose happy

eyeballs this Light has shone, and into whose darkened hearts the joy

and peace and purity of it have flowed, and he says, He was sent'--and

they are sent--to bear witness of that Light.' It is the noblest

function that a man can discharge. It is a function that is discharged

by the very existence through the ages of a community which, generation

after generation, subsists, and generation after generation manifests

in varying degrees of brightness, and with various modifications of

tint, the same light. There is the family character in all true

Christians, with whatever diversities of idiosyncrasies, and national

life or ecclesiastical distinctions. Whether it be Francis of Assisi or

John Wesley, whether it be Thomas a Kempis or George Fox, the light is

one that shines through these many-coloured panes of glass, and the

living Church is the witness of a living Lord, not only before it, and

behind it, and above it, but living in it. They are light' because they

are irradiated by Him. They are light' because they are in the Lord.'

But not only by the fact of the existence of such a community is the

witness-bearing effected, but it comes as a personal obligation, with

immense weight of pressure and immense possibilities of joy in the

discharge of it, to every Christian man and woman.

What, then, is the witness that we all are bound to bear, and shall

bear if we are true to our obligations and to our Lord? Mainly, dear

brethren, the witness of experience. That a Christian man shall be able

to stand up and say, I know this because I live it, and I testify to

Jesus Christ because I for myself have found Him to be the life of my

life, the Light of all my seeing, the joy of my heart, my home, and my

anchorage'--that is the witness that is impregnable. And there is no

better sign of the trend of Christian thought to-day than the fact that

the testimony of experience is more and more coming to be recognised by

thoughtful men and writers as being the sovereign attestation of the

reality of the Light. I see'; that is the proof that light has touched

my eyeballs. And when a man can contrast, as some of us can, our

present vision with our erstwhile darkness, then the evidence, like

that of the sturdy blind man in the Gospels, who had nothing to say in

reply to the subtleties and Rabbinical traps and puzzles but only I was

blind; now I see'--his experience is likely to have the effect that it

had in another miracle of healing: Beholding the man which was healed

standing amongst them, they could say nothing against it.' I should

think they could not.

But there is one thing that will always characterise the true witnesses

to that Light, and that is self-suppression. Remember the beautiful,

immovable humility of the Baptist about whom these texts were spoken:

What sayest thou of thyself?' I am a Voice,' that is all. Art thou that

Prophet?' No!' Art thou the Christ?' No! I am nothing but a Voice.' And

remember how, when John's disciples tried to light the infernal fires

of jealousy in his quiet heart by saying, He whom thou didst baptise,

and to whom thou didst give witness'--He whom thou didst start on His

career--is baptising,' poaching upon thy preserves, and all men come

unto Him,' the only answer that he gave was, The friend of the

Bridegroom'--who stands by in a quiet, dark corner--rejoices greatly

because of the Bridegroom's voice.' Keep yourself out of sight,

Christian teachers and preachers; put Christ in the front, and hide

behind Him.

II. Now let me ask you to look at the other contrast that is suggested

by our other text. The underived light and the kindled lamps.

It is possible to read the words of that second text thus--He was a

lamp kindled and (therefore) shining.' But whether that be the meaning,

or whether the usual rendering is correct, the emblem itself carries

the same thought, for a lamp must be lit by contact with a light, and

must be fed with oil, if its flame is to be sustained. And so the very

metaphor-whatever the force of the ambiguous word--in its eloquent

contrast between the Light and the lamp, suggests this thought, that

the one is underived, self-fed, and therefore undying, and that the

other owes all its flame to the touch of that uncreated Light, and

burns brightly only on condition of its keeping up the contact with

Him, and being fed continually from His stores of radiance.

I need not say more than a word with regard to the former member of

that contrast suggested here. That unlit Light derives its brilliancy,

according to the Scriptural teaching, from nothing but its divine union

with the Father. So that long before there were eyes to see, there was

the eradiation and outshining of the Father's glory. I do not enter

into these depths, but this I would say, that what is called the

originality' of Jesus is only explained when we reverently see in that

unique life the shining through a pure humanity, as through a sheet of

alabaster, of that underived, divine Light. Jesus is an insoluble

problem to men who will not see in Him the Eternal Light which in the

beginning was with God.' You find in Him no trace of gradual

acquisition of knowledge, or of arguing or feeling His way to His

beliefs. You find in Him no trace of consciousness of a great horizon

of darkness encompassing the region where He sees light. You find in

Him no trace of a recognition of other sources from which He has drawn

any portion of His light. You find in Him the distinct declaration that

His relation to truth is not the relation of men who learn, and grow,

and acquire, and know in part; for, says He, I am the Truth.' He stands

apart from us all, and above us all, in that He owes His radiance to

none, and can dispense it to every man. The question which the puzzled

Jews asked about Him, How knoweth this Man letters, having never

learned?' may be widened out to all the characteristics of His human

life. To me the only answer is: Thou art the King of glory, O Christ!

Thou art the Everlasting Son of the Father.'

Dependent on Him are the little lights which He has lit, and in the

midst of which He walks. Union with Jesus Christ--that Light'--is the

condition of all human light. That is true over all regions, as I

believe. The inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding.' The

candle of the Lord shines in every man, and that true Light lighteth

every man that cometh into the world.' Thinker, student, scientist,

poet, author, practical man--all of them are lit from the uncreated

Source, and all of them, if they understand their own nature, would

say, In Thy light do we see Light.'

But especially is this great thought true and exemplified within the

limits of the Christian life. For the Christian to be touched with

Christ's Promethean finger is to flame into light. And the condition of

continuing to shine is to continue the contact which first illuminated.

A break in the contact, of a finger's breadth, is as effectual as one

of a mile. Let Christian men and women, if they would shine, remember,

Ye are light in the Lord'; and if we stray, and get without the circle

of the Light, we pass into darkness, and ourselves cease to shine.

Brethren, it is threadbare truth, that the condition of Christian

vitality and radiance is close and unbroken contact with Jesus Christ,

the Source of all light. Threadbare; but if we lived as if we believed

it, the Church would be revolutionised and the world illuminated; and

many a smoking wick would flash up into a blazing torch. Let Christian

people remember that the words of my text define no special privilege

or duty of any official or man of special endowments, but that to all

of us has been said, Ye are My witnesses,' and to all of us is offered

the possibility of being burning and shining lights' if we keep

ourselves close to that Light.

III. Lastly, the second of my texts suggests--the contrast between the

Undying Light and the lamps that go out.

For a season ye were willing to rejoice in His light.' There is nothing

in the present condition of the civilised and educated world more

remarkable and more difficult for some people to explain than the

contrast between the relation which Jesus Christ bears to the present

age, and the relation which all other great names in the

past--philosophers, poets, guides of men--bear to it. There is nothing

in the world the least like the vividness, the freshness, the

closeness, of the personal relation which thousands and thousands of

people, with common sense in their heads, bear to that Man who died

nineteen hundred years ago. All others pass, sooner or later, into the

darkness. Thickening mists of oblivion, fold by fold, gather round the

brightest names. But here is Jesus Christ, whom all classes of thinkers

and social reformers have to reckon with to-day, who is a living power

amongst the trivialities of the passing moment, and in whose words and

in the teaching of whose life serious men feel that there lie

undeveloped yet, and certainly not yet put into practice, principles

which are destined to revolutionise society and change the world. And

how does that come?

I am not going to enter upon that question; I only ask you to think of

the contrast between His position, in this generation, to communities

and individuals, and the position of all other great names which lie in

the past. Why, it does not take more than a lifetime such as mine, for

instance, to remember how the great lights that shone seventy years ago

in English thinking and in English literature, have for the most part

gone out, and what we young men thought to be bright particular stars,

this new generation pooh-poohs as mere exhalations from the marsh or

twinkling and uncertain tapers, and you will find their books in the

twopenny-box at the bookseller's door. A cynical diplomatist, in one of

our modern dramas, sums it up, after seeing the death of a

revolutionary, I have known eight leaders of revolts.' And some of us

could say, We have known about as many guides of men who have been

forgotten and passed away.' His Name shall endure for ever. His name

shall continue as long as the sun, and men shall be blessed in Him; all

generations shall call Him blessed.' Even Shelley had the prophecy

forced from him--

The moon of Mahomet

Arose and it shall set,

While blazoned as on heaven's eternal noon,

The Cross leads generations on.'

We may sum up the contrast between the undying Light and the lamps that

go out in the old words: They truly were many, because they were not

suffered to continue by reason of death, but this Man, because He

continueth ever . . . is able to save unto the uttermost them that come

unto God through Him.'

So, brethren, when lamps are quenched, let us look to the Light. When

our own lives are darkened because our household light is taken from

its candlestick, let us lift up our hearts and hopes to Him that

abideth for ever. Do not let us fall into the folly, and commit the

sin, of putting our heart's affections, our spirit's trust, upon any

that can pass and that must change. We need a Person whom we can clasp,

and who never will glide from our hold. We need a Light uncreated,

self-fed, eternal. Whilst ye have the Light, believe in the Light, that

ye may be the children of light.'

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THREE TABERNACLES'

The Word . . . dwelt among us.'--JOHN i. 14.

. . . He that sitteth on the Throne shall dwell among them.'--REV. vii.

15.

. . . Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with

them.'--REV. xxi. 3.

The word rendered dwelt' in these three passages, is a peculiar one. It

is only found in the New Testament--in this Gospel and in the Book of

Revelation. That fact constitutes one of the many subtle threads of

connection between these two books, which at first sight seem so

extremely unlike each other; and it is a morsel of evidence in favour

of the common authorship of the Gospel and of the Apocalypse, which has

often, and very vehemently in these latter days of criticism, been

denied.

The force of the word, however, is the matter to which I desire

especially to draw attention. It literally means to dwell in a tent,'

or, if we may use such a word, to tabernacle,' and there is no doubt a

reference to the Tabernacle in which the divine Presence abode in the

wilderness and in the land of Israel before the erection. In all three

passages, then, we may see allusion to that early symbolical dwelling

of God with man. The Word tabernacled among us'; so is the truth for

earth and time. He that sitteth upon the throne shall spread His

tabernacle upon' the multitude which no man can number, who have made

their robes white in the blood of the Lamb; that is the truth for the

spirits of just men made perfect, the waiting Church, which expects the

redemption of the body. God shall tabernacle with them'; that is the

truth for the highest condition of humanity, when the Tabernacle of God

shall be with redeemed men in the new earth. Let us build three

tabernacles,' one for the Incarnate Christ, one for the interspace

between earth and heaven, and one for the culmination of all things.

And it is to these three aspects of the one thought, set forth in rude

symbol by the movable tent in the wilderness, that I ask you to turn

now.

I. First, then, we have to think of that Tabernacle for earth. The Word

was made flesh, and dwelt, as in a tent, amongst us.'

The human nature, the visible, material body of Jesus Christ, in which

there enshrined itself the everlasting Word, which from the beginning

was the Agent of all divine revelation, that is the true Temple of God.

When we begin to speak about the special presence of Omnipresence in

any one place, we soon lose ourselves, and get into deep waters of

glory, where there is no standing. And I do not care to deal here with

theological definitions or thorny questions, but simply to set forth,

as the language of my text sets before us, that one transcendent,

wonderful, all-blessed thought that this poor human nature is capable

of, and has really once in the history of the world received into

itself, the real, actual presence of the whole fulness of the Divinity.

What must be the kindred and likeness between Godhood and manhood when

into the frail vehicle of our humanity that wondrous treasure can be

poured; when the fire of God can burn in the bush of our human nature,

and that nature not be consumed? So it has been. In Him dwelleth all

the fulness of the Godhead bodily.'

And when we come with our questions, How? In what manner? How can the

lesser contain the greater? we have to be content with the recognition

that the manner is beyond our fathoming, and to accept the fact,

pressed upon our faith, that our hearts may grasp it and be at peace.

God hath dwelt in humanity. The everlasting Word, who is the

forthcoming of all the fulness of Deity into the realm of finite

creatures, was made flesh and dwelt among us.

But the Tabernacle was not only the dwelling-place of God, it was also

and, therefore, the place of Revelation of God. So in our text there

follows, we beheld His glory.' As in the tent in the wilderness there

hovered between the outstretched wings of the silent cherubim, above

the Mercy-seat, the brightness of the symbolical cloud which was

expressly named the glory of God,' and was the visible manifestation of

His real presence; so John would have us think that in that lowly

humanity, with its curtains and its coverings of flesh, there lay

shrined in the inmost place the brightness of the light of the manifest

glory of God. We beheld His glory.' The rapturous adoration of the

remembrance overcomes him, and he breaks his sentence, reckless of

grammatical connection, as the fulness of the blessed memory floods

into his soul. That glory was as of the Only Begotten of the Father.'

The manifestation of God in Christ is unique, as becomes Him who

partakes of the nature of that God of whom He is the Representative and

the Revealer.

And how did that glory make itself known to us? By miracle? Yes! As we

read in the story of the first that Christ wrought, He manifested forth

His glory and His disciples believed upon Him.' By miracle? Yes! As we

read His own promise at the grave of Lazarus: Said I not unto thee,

that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?'

But, blessed be His name, miracle is not the highest manifestation of

Christ's glory and of God's. The uniqueness of the revelation of

Christ's glory in God does not depend upon the deeds which He wrought.

For, as the context goes on to tell, the Word which tabernacled among

us was full of grace and truth,' and therein is the glory most

gloriously revealed.

The lambent light of stooping love that shone forth warning and

attracting in His gentle life, and the clear white beam of unmingled

truth that streamed from the radiant purity of Christ's life, revealed

God to hearts that pine for love and spirits that hunger for truth, as

no others of God's self-revealing works have done. And that revelation

of the glory of God in the fulness of grace and truth is the highest

possible revelation. For the divinest thing in God is love, and the

true glory of God' is neither some symbolical flashing light nor the

pomp of mere power and majesty; nor even those inconceivable and

incommunicable attributes which we christen with names like Omnipotence

and Omnipresence and Infinitude, and the like. These are all at the

fringes of the brightness. The true central heart and lustrous light of

the glory of God lie In His love, and of that glory Christ is the

unique Representative and Revealer, because He is the only Begotten

Son, and full of grace and truth.'

Thus the Word tabernacled amongst us. And though the Tabernacle to

outward seeming was covered by curtains and skins that hid all the

glowing splendour within; yet in that lowly life that was lived in the

body of His humiliation, and knew our limitations and our weaknesses,

the glory of the Lord was revealed; and all flesh hath seen it

together' and acknowledged the divine Presence there.

Still further the Tabernacle was the place of sacrifice. So in the

tabernacle of His flesh Jesus offered up the one sacrifice for sins for

ever. In the offering up of His human life in continuous obedience, and

in the offering up of His body and blood in the bitter Passion of the

Cross, He brought men nigh unto God.

Therefore, because of all these things, because the Tabernacle is the

dwelling-place of God, the place of revelation, and the place of

sacrifice, therefore, finally is it the meeting-place betwixt God and

man. In the Old Testament it is always called by the name which our

Revised Version has accurately substituted for tabernacle of the

congregation,' namely tent of meeting.' The correctness of that

rendering and the meaning of the name are established by several

passages in the Old Testament, as for instance, There I will meet with

you, to speak there unto thee, and there I will meet with the children

of Israel.' So in Christ, who by His Incarnation lays His hand upon

both, God touches man and man touches God. We who are afar off are made

nigh, and in that true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man'

we meet God and are glad.

And so the word was flesh, and wrought

With human hands the creed of creeds,

In loveliness of perfect deeds.'

The temple for earth is the temple of His body.'

II. We have the Tabernacle for the Heavens.

In the context of our second passage we have a vision of the great

multitude redeemed out of all nations and kindreds, standing before the

Throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their

hands.' The palms in their hands give important help towards

understanding the vision. As has been often remarked, there are no

heathen emblems in the Book of the Apocalypse. All its metaphors move

within the circle of Jewish experiences and facts. So that we are not

to think of the Roman palm of victory, but of the Jewish palm which was

borne at the Feast of Tabernacles. What was the Feast of Tabernacles? A

festival established on purpose to recall to the minds and to the

gratitude of the Jews settled in their own land the days of their

wandering in the wilderness. Part of the ritual of it was that during

its celebration they builded for themselves booths or tabernacles of

leaves and boughs of trees, under which they dwelt, thus reminding

themselves of their nomad condition.

Now what beauty and power it gives to the word of my text, if we take

in this allusion to the Jewish festival! The great multitude bearing

the palms are keeping the feast, memorial of past wilderness

wanderings; and He that sitteth on the throne shall spread His

tabernacle above them,' as the word might be here rendered. That is to

say, He Himself shall build and be the tent in which they dwell; He

Himself shall dwell with them in it. He Himself, in closer union than

can be conceived of here, shall keep them company during that feast.

What a thought of that condition--the condition as I believe

represented in this vision--of the spirits of the just made perfect,

who wait for the adoption, to wit, the resurrection of the body,' is

given us if we take this point of view to interpret the whole lovely

symbolism. It is all a time of glad, grateful remembrance of the

wilderness march. It is all a time in which festal joys shall be

theirs, and the memory of the trials and the weariness and the sorrow

and the solitude that are past shall deepen to a more exquisite

poignancy of delight, the rest and the fellowship and the felicity of

that calm Presence, and God Himself shall spread His tent above them,

lodge with them, and they with Him.

And so, dear brethren, rest in that assurance, that though we know so

little of that state, we know this: Absent from the body, present with

the Lord,' and that the happy company who bear the palms shall dwell in

God, and God in them.

III. And now, lastly, look at that final vision which we have in these

texts, which we may call the Tabernacle for the renewed earth.

I do not pretend to interpret the scenery and the setting of these

Apocalyptic visions with dogmatic confidence, but it seems to me as if

the emblems of this final vision coincide with dim hints in many other

portions of Scripture; to the effect that some cosmical change having

passed upon this material world in which we dwell, it, in some

regenerated form, shall be the final abode of a regenerated and

redeemed humanity. That, I think, is the natural interpretation of a

great deal of Scriptural teaching.

For that highest condition there is set forth this as the all-sufficing

light upon it. Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will

tabernacle with them.' The climax and the goal of all the divine

working, and the long processes of God's love for, and discipline of,

the world, are to be this, that He and men shall abide together in

unity and concord. That is God's wish from the beginning. We read in

one of the profound utterances of the Book of Proverbs how from of old

the delights' of the Incarnate Wisdom which foreshadowed the Incarnate

Word were with the sons of men.' And, at the close of all things, when

the vision of this final chapter shall be fulfilled, God will say,

settling Himself in the midst of a redeemed humanity, Lo! here will I

dwell, for I have desired it. This is My rest for ever.' He will

tabernacle with men, and men with Him.

We know not, and never shall know until experience strips the bandages

from our eyes, what new methods of participation of the divine nature,

and new possibilities of intimacy and intercourse with Him may be ours

when the veils of flesh and sense and time have all dropped away. New

windows may be opened in our spirits, from which we shall perceive new

aspects of the divine character. New doors may be opened in our souls,

from out of which we may pass to touch parts of His nature, all

impalpable and inconceivable to us now. And when all the veils of a

discordant moral nature are taken away, and we are pure, then we shall

see, then we shall draw nigh to God. The thing that chiefly separates

man from God is man's sin. When that is removed, the centrifugal force

which kept our tiny orb apart from the great central sun being

withdrawn, we shall, as it were, fall into the brightness and be one,

not losing our sense of individuality, which would be to lose all the

blessedness, but united with Him in a union far more intimate than

earth can parallel. The Tabernacle of God shall be with men, and He

will tabernacle with them.'

Do not let us forget that this highest and ultimate hope that is held

forth here, of the union and communion, perfect and perpetual, of

humanity with God, does not sweep aside Jesus Christ. For through all

eternity the Everlasting Word, the Christ who bears our nature in its

glorified form, or, rather, whose nature in its glorified form we shall

bear, is the Medium of Revelation, and the Medium of communication

between man and God.

I saw no Temple therein,' says this final vision of the Apocalypse, but

God Almighty and the Lamb,' and these are the Temples thereof.

Therefore through eternity God shall tabernacle with men, as He does

tabernacle with us now through Him, in whom dwelleth as in its

perennial habitation, all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.'

So we have the three tabernacles, for earth, for heaven, for the

renewed earth; and these three, if I may say so, are like the triple

division of that ancient Tabernacle in the wilderness: the Outer Court;

the Holy Place; the Holiest of all. Let us enter into that outer court,

and abide and commune with that God who comes near to us, revealing,

forgiving, in the person of His Son, and then we shall pass from court

to court, and go from strength to strength, until every one of us in

Zion appear before God'; and enter into the Holiest of all, where

within the veil' we shall receive splendours of revelation undreamed of

here, and enjoy depths of communion to which the selectest moments of

fellowship with God on earth are shallow and poor.

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THE FULNESS OF CHRIST

And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.'--JOHN i.

16.

What a remarkable claim that is which the Apostle here makes for his

Master! On the one side he sets His solitary figure as the universal

Giver; on the other side are gathered the whole race of men, recipients

from Him. As in the wilderness the children of Israel clustered round

the rock from which poured out streams, copious enough for all the

thirsty camp, John, echoing his Master's words, If any man thirst, let

him come unto Me and drink,' here declares Of His fulness have all we

received.'

I. Notice, then, the one ever full Source.

The words of my text refer back to those of the fourteenth verse: The

Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.' And

of His fulness have all we received.' The fulness' here seems to mean

that of which the Incarnate Word was full, the grace and truth' which

dwelt without measure in Him; the unlimited and absolute completeness

and abundance of divine powers and glories which tabernacled' in Him.

And so the language of my text, both verbally and really, is

substantially equivalent to that of the Apostle Paul. In Him dwelleth

all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are complete in Him.' The

whole infinite Majesty, and inexhaustible resources of the divine

nature, were incorporated and insphered in that Incarnate Word from

whom all men may draw.

There are involved in that thought two ideas. One is the unmistakable

assertion of the whole fulness of the divine nature as being in the

Incarnate Word, and the other is that the whole fulness of the divine

nature dwells in the Incarnate Word in order that men may get at it.

The words of my text go back, as I said, to the previous verse; but

notice what an advance upon that previous verse they present to us.

There we read, We beheld His glory.' To behold is much, but to possess

is more. It is much to say that Christ comes to manifest God, but that

is a poor, starved account of the purpose of His coming, if that is all

you have to say. He comes to manifest Him. Yes! but He comes to

communicate Him, not merely to dazzle us with a vision, not merely to

show us Him as from afar, not merely to make Him known to understanding

or to heart; but to bestow--in no mere metaphor, but in simple, literal

fact--the absolute possession of the divine nature. We beheld His

glory' is a reminiscence that thrills the Evangelist, though half a

century has passed since the vision gleamed upon his eyes; but of His

fulness have all we received' is infinitely and unspeakably more. And

the manifestation was granted that the possession might be sure, for

this is the very centre and heart of Christianity, that in Him who is

Christianity God is not merely made known, but given; not merely

beheld, but possessed.

In order that that divine fulness might belong to us there was needed

that the Word should be made flesh; and there was further needed that

incarnation should be crowned by sacrifice, and that life should be

perfected in death. The alabaster box had to be broken before the house

could be filled with the odour of the ointment. If I may so say, the

sack, the coarse-spun sack of Christ's humanity, had to be cut asunder

in order that the wealth that was stored in it might be poured into our

hands. God came near us in the life, but God became ours in the death,

of His dear Son. Incarnation was needed for that great privilege--we

beheld His glory'; but the Crucifixion was needed in order to make

possible the more wondrous prerogative: Of His fulness have all we

received.' God gives Himself to men in the Christ whose life revealed

and whose death imparted Him to the world.

And so He is the sole Source. All men, in a very real sense, draw from

His fulness. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.' The

life of the body and the life of the spirit willing, knowing, loving,

all which makes life into light, all comes to us through that

everlasting Word of God. And when that Word has become flesh and dwelt

among us,' His gifts are not only the gifts of light and life, which

all men draw from Him, but the gifts of grace and truth which all those

who love Him receive at His hands. His gifts, like the water from some

fountain, may flow underground into many of the pastures of the

wilderness; and many a man is blessed by them who knows not from whence

they come. It is He from whom all the truth, all the grace which

illuminates and blesses humanity, flow into all lands in all ages.

II. Consider, then, again, the many receivers from the one Source. Of

His fulness have all we received.'

Observe, we are not told definitely what it is that we receive. If we

refer back to words in a previous verse, they may put us on the right

track for answering the question, What is it that we get? He came unto

His own,' says verse 11, and His own received Him not; but as many as

received Him, to them gave He power,' etc. That answers the question,

What do we receive? Christ is more than all His gifts. All His gifts

are treasured up in Him and inseparable from Him. We get Jesus Christ

Himself.

The blessings that we receive may be stated in many different ways. You

may say we get pardon, purity, hope, joy, the prospect of Heaven, power

for service; all these and a hundred more designations by which we

might describe the one gift. All these are but the consequences of our

having got the Christ within our hearts. He does not give pardon and

the rest, as a king might give pardon and honours, a thousand miles

off, bestowing it by a mere word, upon some criminal, but He gives all

that He gives because He gives Himself. The real possession that we

receive is neither more nor less than a loving Saviour, to enter our

spirits and abide there, and be the spirit of our spirits, and the life

of our lives.

Then, notice the universality of this possession. John has said, in the

previous words, We beheld His glory.' He refers there, of course, to

the comparatively small circle of the eye-witnesses of our Master's

life; who, at the time when he wrote, must have been very, very few in

number. They had had the prerogative of seeing with their eyes and

handling with their hands the Word of life that was manifested unto

us'; and with that prerogative the duty of bearing witness of Him to

the rest of men. But in the receiving,' John associates with himself,

and with the other eyewitnesses, all those who had listened to their

word, and had received the truth in the love of it. We beheld' refers

to the narrower circle; we all received' to the wider sweep of the

whole Church. There is no exclusive class, no special prerogative.

Every Christian man, the weakest, the lowliest, the most uncultured,

rude, ignorant, foolish, the most besotted in the past, who has

wandered furthest away from the Master; whose spirit has been most

destitute of all sparks of goodness and of God--receives from out of

His fulness. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of

His.' And every one of us, if we will, may have dwelling in our hearts,

in the greatness of His strength, in the sweetness of His love, in the

clearness of His illuminating wisdom, the Incarnate Word, the

Comforter, the All-in-all whom we all receive.'

And, as I said, that word all' might have even a wider extension

without going beyond the limits of the truth. For on the one side there

stands Christ, the universal Giver; and grouped before Him, in all

attitudes of weakness and of want, is gathered the whole race of

mankind. And from Him there pours out a stream copious enough to supply

all the necessities of every human soul that lives to-day, of every

human soul that has lived in the past, of every one that shall live in

the future. There is no limit to the universality except only the limit

of the human will: Whosoever will, let him take the water of life

freely.'

Think of that solitary figure of the Christ reared up, as it were,

before the whole race of man, as able to replenish all their emptiness

with His fulness, and to satisfy all their thirst with His sufficiency.

Dear brother! you have a great gaping void in your heart--an aching

emptiness there, which you know better than I can tell you. Look to Him

who can fill it and it shall be filled. He can supply all your wants as

He can supply all the wants of every soul of man. And after generations

have drawn from Him, the water will not have sunk one hairsbreadth in

the great fountain, but there will be enough for all coming eternities

as there has been enough for all past times. He is like His own

miracle--the thousands are gathered on the grass, they do all eat and

are filled.' As their necessities required the bread was multiplied,

and at the last there was more left than there had seemed to be at the

beginning. So of His fulness have all we received'; and after a

universe has drawn from it, for an Eternity, the fulness is not turned

into scantiness or emptiness.

III. And so, lastly, notice the continuous flow from the inexhaustible

Source. Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.'

The word for' is a little singular. Of course it means instead of, in

exchange for; and the Evangelist's idea seems to be that as one supply

of grace is given and used, it is, as it were, given back to the

Bestower, who substitutes for it a fresh and unused vessel, filled with

new grace. He might have said, grace upon grace; one supply being piled

upon the other. But his notion is, rather, one supply given in

substitution for the other, new lamps for old ones.'

Just as a careful gardener will stand over a plant that needs water,

and will pour the water on the surface until the earth has drunk it up,

and then add a little more; so He gives step by step, grace for grace,

an uninterrupted bestowal, yet regulated according to the absorbing

power of the heart that receives it. Underlying that great thought are

two things: the continuous communication of grace, and the progressive

communication of grace. We have here the continuous communication of

grace. God is always pouring Himself out upon us in Christ. There is a

perpetual out flow from Him to us: if there is not a perpetual inflow

into us from Him it is our fault, and not His. He is always giving, and

His intention is that our lives shall be a continual reception. Are

they? How many Christian men there are whose Christian lives at the

best are like some of those Australian or Siberian rivers; in the dry

season, a pond here, a stretch of sand, waterless and barren there,

then another place with a drop of muddy water in some hollow, and then

another stretch of sand, and so on. Why should not the ponds be linked

together by a flashing stream? God is always pouring Himself out; why

do we not always take Him in?

There is but one answer, and the answer is, that we do not fulfil the

condition, which condition is simple faith. As many as received Him, to

them gave He power to become the sons of God; even to them that

believed on His name.' Faith is the condition of receiving, and

wherever there is a continuous trust there will be an unbroken grace;

and wherever there are interrupted gifts it is because there has been

an intermitted trust in Him. Do not let your lives be like some dimly

lighted road, with a lamp here, and a stretch of darkness, and then

another twinkling light; let the light run all along the side of your

path, because at every moment your heart is turning to Christ with

trust. Make your faith continuous, and God will make His grace

incessant, and out of His fulness you will draw continual supplies of

needed strength.

But not only have we here the notion of continuous, but also, as it

seems to me, of progressive gifts. Each measure of Christ received, if

we use it aright, makes us capable of possessing more of Christ. And

the measure of our capacity is the measure of His gift, and the more we

can hold the more we shall get. The walls of our hearts are elastic,

the vessel expands by being filled out; it throbs itself wider by

desire and faith. The wider we open our mouths the larger will be the

gift that God puts into them. Each measure and stage of grace utilised

and honestly employed will make us capable and desirous, and,

therefore, possessors, of more and more of the grace that He gives. So

the ideal of the Christian life, and God's intention concerning us, is

not only that we should have an uninterrupted, but a growing

possession, of Christ and of His grace.

Is that the case with you, my friend? Can you hold more of God than you

could twenty years ago? Is there any more capacity in your soul for

more of Christ than there was long, long ago? If there is you have more

of Him; if you have not more of Him it is because you cannot contain

more; and you cannot contain more because you have not desired more,

and because you have been so wretchedly unfaithful in your use of what

you had. The ideal is, they go from strength to strength,' and the end

of that is, every one of them appeareth before God.'

So, dear brother, as the dash of the waves will hollow out some little

indentation on the coast, and make it larger and larger until there is

a great bay, with its headlands miles apart, and its deep bosom

stretching far into the interior, and all the expanse full of flashing

waters and leaping waves, so the giving Christ works a place for

Himself in a man's heart, and makes the spirit which receives and

faithfully uses the gifts which He brings, capable of more of Himself,

and fills the widened space with larger gifts and new grace.

Only remember the condition of having Him is trusting to His name and

longing for His presence. If any man open the door I will come in.' We

have Him if we trust Him. That trust is no mere passive reception, such

as is the case with some empty jar which lies open-mouthed on the shore

and lets the sea wash into it and out of it, as may happen. But the

receive' of our text might be as truly rendered take.' Faith is an

active taking, not a passive receiving. We must lay hold on eternal

life.' Faith is the hand that grasps the offered gift, the mouth that

feeds upon the bread of God, the voice that says to Christ, Come in,

Thou blessed of the Lord; why standest Thou without?' Such a faith

alone brings us into vital connection with Jesus. Without it, you will

be none the richer for all His fulness, and may perish of famine in the

midst of plenty, like a man dying of hunger outside the door of a

granary. They who believe take the Saviour who is given, and they who

take receive, and they who receive obtain day by day growing grace from

the fulness of Christ, and so come ever nearer to the realisation of

the ultimate purpose of the Father, that they should be filled with all

the fulness of God.'

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GRACE AND TRUTH

The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus

Christ.'--JOHN i. 17.

There are scarcely any traces, in the writings of the Apostle John, of

that great controversy as to the relation of the Law and the Gospel

which occupied and embittered so much of the work of the Apostle Paul.

We have floated into an entirely different region in John's writings.

The old controversies are dead--settled, I suppose, mainly by Paul's

own words, and also to a large extent by the logic of events. This

verse is almost the only one in which John touches upon that extinct

controversy, and here the Law is introduced simply as a foil to set off

the brightness of the Gospel. All artists know the value of contrast in

giving prominence. A dark background flashes up brighter colours into

brilliancy. White is never so white as when it is relieved against

black. And so here the special preciousness and distinctive

peculiarities of what we receive in Christ are made more vivid and more

distinct by contrast with what in old days was given by Moses.'

Every word in this verse is significant. Law' is set against grace and

truth.' It was given'; they came.' Moses is contrasted with Christ. So

we have a threefold antithesis as between Law and Gospel: in reference

to their respective contents; in reference to the manner of their

communication; and in reference to the person of their Founders. And I

think, if we look at these three points, we shall get some clear

apprehension of the glories of that Gospel which the Apostle would

thereby commend to our affection and to our faith.

I. First of all, then, we have here the special glory of the contents

of the Gospel heightened by the contrast with Law.

Law has no tenderness, no pity, no feeling. Tables of stone and a pen

of iron are its fitting vehicles. Flashing lightnings and rolling

thunders symbolise the fierce light which it casts upon men's duty and

the terrors of its retribution. Inflexible, and with no compassion for

human weakness, it tells us what we ought to be, but it does not help

us to be it. It binds heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne,' upon

men's consciences, but puts not forth the tip of a finger' to enable

men to bear them. And this is true about law in all forms, whether it

be the Mosaic Law, or whether it be the law of our own country, or

whether it be the laws written upon men's consciences. These all

partake of the one characteristic, that they help nothing to the

fulfilment of their own behests, and that they are barbed with

threatenings of retribution. Like some avenging goddess, law comes down

amongst men, terrible in her purity, awful in her beauty, with a hard

light in her clear grey eyes--in the one hand the tables of stone,

bearing the commandments which we have broken, and in the other a sharp

two-edged sword.

And this is the opposite of all that comes to us in the Gospel. The

contrast divides into two portions. The Law' is set against grace and

truth.' Let us look at these two in order.

What we have in Christ is not law, but grace. Law, as I said, has no

heart; the meaning of the Gospel is the unveiling of the heart of God.

Law commands and demands; it says: This shalt thou do, or else--'; and

it has nothing more that it can say. What is the use of standing beside

a lame man, and pointing to a shining summit, and saying to him, Get up

there, and you will breathe a purer atmosphere'? He is lying lame at

the foot of it. There is no help for any soul in law. Men are not

perishing because they do not know what they ought to do. Men are not

bad because they doubt as to what their duty is. The worst man in the

world knows a great deal more of what he ought to do than the best man

in the world practises. So it is not for want of precepts that so many

of us are going to destruction, but it is for want of power to fulfil

the precepts.

Grace is love giving. Law demands, grace bestows. Law comes saying Do

this,' and our consciences respond to the imperativeness of the

obligation. But grace comes and says, I will help thee to do it.' Law

is God requiring; grace is God bestowing. Give what Thou commandest,

and then command what Thou wilt.'

Oh, brethren! we have all of us written upon the fleshly tablets of our

hearts solemn commandments which we know are binding upon us; and which

we sometimes would fain keep, but cannot. Is this not a message of hope

and blessedness that comes to us? Grace has drawn near in Jesus Christ,

and a giving God, who bestows upon us a life that will unfold itself in

accordance with the highest law, holds out the fulness of His gift in

that Incarnate Word. Law has no heart; the Gospel is the unveiling of

the heart of God. Law commands; grace is God bestowing Himself.

And still further, law condemns. Grace is love that bends down to an

evildoer, and deals not on the footing of strict retribution with the

infirmities and the sins of us poor weaklings. And so, seeing that no

man that lives but hears in his heart an accusing voice, and that every

one of us knows what it is to gaze upon lofty duties that we have

shrunk from, upon plain obligations from the yoke of which we have

selfishly and cowardly withdrawn our necks; seeing that every man,

woman, and child listening to me now has, lurking in some corner of

their hearts, a memory that only needs to be quickened to be a torture,

and deeds that only need to have the veil drawn away from them to

terrify and shame them--oh! surely it ought to be a word of gladness

for every one of us that, in front of any law that condemns us, stands

forth the gentle, gracious form of the Christ that brings pardon, and

the grace of God that bringeth salvation unto all men.' Thank God! law

needed to be given,' but it was only the foundation on which was to be

reared a better thing. The law was given By Moses'--a schoolmaster,' as

conscience is to-day, to bring us to Christ' by whom comes the grace

that loves, that stoops, that gives, and that pardons.

Still further, there is another antithesis here. The Gospel which comes

by Christ is not law, but truth. The object of law is to regulate

conduct, and only subordinately to inform the mind or to enlighten the

understanding. The Mosaic Law had for its foundation, of course, a

revelation of God. But that revelation of God was less prominent,

proportionately, than the prescription for man's conduct. The Gospel is

the opposite of this. It has for its object the regulation of conduct;

but that object is less prominent, proportionately, than the other, the

manifestation and the revelation of God. The Old Testament says Thou

shalt'; the New Testament says God is.' The Old was Law; the New is

Truth.

And so we may draw the inference, on which I do not need to dwell, how

miserably inadequate and shallow a conception of Christianity that is

which sets it forth as being mainly a means of regulating conduct, and

how false and foolish that loose talk is that we hear many a

time.--Never mind about theological subtleties; conduct is the main

thing.' Not so. The Gospel is not law; the Gospel is truth. It is a

revelation of God to the understanding and to the heart, in order that

thereby the will may be subdued, and that then the conduct may be

shaped and moulded. But let us begin where it begins, and let us

remember that the morality of the New Testament has never long been

held up high and pure, where the theology of the New Testament has been

neglected and despised. The law came by Moses; truth came by Jesus

Christ.'

But, still further, let me remind you that, in the revelation of a God

who is gracious, giving to our emptiness and forgiving our sins--that

is to say, in the revelation of grace--we have a far deeper, nobler,

more blessed conception of the divine nature than in law. It is great

to think of a righteous God, it is great and ennobling to think of One

whose pure eyes cannot look upon sin, and who wills that men should

live pure and noble and Godlike lives. But it is far more and more

blessed, transcending all the old teaching, when we sit at the feet of

the Christ who gives, and who pardons, and look up into His deep eyes,

with the tears of compassion shining in them, and say: Lo! This is our

God! We have waited for Him and He will save us.' That is a better

truth, a deeper truth than prophets and righteous men of old possessed;

and to us there has come, borne on the wings of the mighty angel of His

grace, the precious revelation of the Father-God whose heart is love.

The law was given by Moses,' but brighter than the gleam of the

presence between the Cherubim is the lambent light of gentle tenderness

that shines from the face of Jesus Christ. Grace, and therefore truth,

a deeper truth, came by Him.

And, still further, let me remind you of how this contrast is borne out

by the fact that all that previous system was an adumbration, a shadow

and a premonition of the perfect revelation that was to come. Temple,

priest, sacrifice, law, the whole body of the Mosaic constitution of

things was, as it were, a shadow thrown along the road in advance by

the swiftly coming King. The shadow fell before Him, but when He came

the shadow disappeared. The former was a system of types, symbols,

pictures. Here is the reality that antiquates and fulfils and

transcends them all. The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came

by Jesus Christ.'

II. Now, secondly, look at the other contrast that is here, between

giving and coming.

I do not know that I have quite succeeded in making clear to my own

mind the precise force of this antithesis. Certainly there is a

profound meaning if one can fathom it; perhaps one might put it best in

something like the following fashion.

The word rendered came' might be more correctly translated became,' or

came into being.' The law was given; grace and truth came to be.

Now, what do we mean when we talk about a law being given? We simply

mean, I suppose, that it is promulgated, either in oral or in written

words. It is, after all, no more than so many words. It is given when

it is spoken or published. It is a verbal communication at the best.

But grace and truth came to be.' They are realities; they are not

words. They are not communicated by sentences, they are actual

existences; and they spring into being as far as man's historical

possession and experience of them are concerned--they spring into being

in Jesus Christ, and through Him they belong to us all. Not that there

was no grace, no manifest lore of God, in the world, nor any true

knowledge of Him before the Incarnation, but the earlier portions of

this chapter remind us that all of grace, however restrained and

partial, that all of truth, however imperfect and shadowy it may have

been, which were in the world before Christ came, were owing to the

operation of that Eternal Word Who became flesh and dwelt among us,'

and that these, in comparison with the affluence and the fulness and

the nearness of grace and truth after Christ's coming, were so small

and remote that it is not an exaggeration to say that, as far as man's

possession and experience of them are concerned, the giving love of God

and the clear and true knowledge of His deep heart of tenderness and

grace, sprang into being with the historical manifestation of Jesus

Christ the Lord.

He comes to reveal by no words. His gift is not like the gift that

Moses brought down from the mountain, merely a writing upon tables; His

gift is not the letter of an outward commandment, nor the letter of an

outward revelation. It is the thing itself which He reveals by being

it. He does not speak about grace, He brings it; He does not show us

God by His words, He shows us God by His acts. He does not preach about

Him, but He lives Him, He manifests Him. His gentleness, His

compassion, His miracles, His wisdom, His patience, His tears, His

promises; all these are the very Deity in action before our eyes; and

instead of a mere verbal revelation, which is so imperfect and so

worthless, grace and truth, the living realities, are flashed upon a

darkened world in the face of Jesus Christ. How cold, how hard, how

superficial, in comparison with that fleshly table of the heart of

Christ on which grace and truth were written, are the stony tables of

law, which bore after all, for all their majesty, only words which are

breath and nothing besides.

III. And so, lastly, look at the contrast that is drawn here between

the persons of the Founders.

I do not suppose that we are to take into consideration the difference

between the limitations of the one and the completeness of the other. I

do not suppose that the Apostle was thinking about the difference

between the reluctant service of the Lawgiver and the glad obedience of

the Son; or between the passion and the pride that sometimes marred

Moses' work, and the continual calmness and patient meekness that

perfected the sacrifice of Jesus. Nor do I suppose that there flashed

before his memory the difference between that strange tomb where God

buried the prophet, unknown of men, in the stern solitude of the

desert, true symbol of the solemn mystery and awful solitude with which

the law which we have broken invests death, to our trembling

consciences, and the grave in the garden with the spring flowers

bursting round it, and visited by white-robed angels, who spoke comfort

to weeping friends, true picture of what His death makes the grave for

all His followers.

But I suppose he was mainly thinking of the contrast between the

relation of Moses to his law, and of Christ to His Gospel. Moses was

but a medium. His personality had nothing to do with his message. You

may take away Moses, and the law stands all the same. But Christ is so

interwoven with Christ's message that you cannot rend the two apart;

you cannot have the figure of Christ melt away, and the gift that

Christ brought remain. If you extinguish the sun you cannot keep the

sunlight; if you put away Christ in the fulness of His manhood and of

His divinity, in the power of His Incarnation and the omnipotence of

His cross--if you put away Christ from Christianity, it collapses into

dust and nothingness.

So, dear brethren, do not let any of us try that perilous experiment.

You cannot melt away Jesus and keep grace and truth. You cannot tamper

with His character, with His nature, with the mystery of His passion,

with the atoning power of His cross, and preserve the blessings that He

has brought to the world. If you want the grace which is the unveiling

of the heart of God, the gift of a giving God and the pardon of a

forgiving Judge; or if you want the truth, the reality of the knowledge

of Him, you can only get them by accepting Christ. I am the Truth, and

the Way, and the Life.' There is a law given which gives life,' and

righteousness is by that law.' There is a Person who is the Truth, and

our knowledge of the truth is through that Person, and through Him

alone. By humble faith receive Him into your hearts, and He will come

bringing to you the fulness of grace and truth.

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THE WORLD'S SIN-BEARER

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the

Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.'--JOHN i. 29.

Our Lord, on returning from His temptation in the wilderness, came

straight to John the Baptist. He was welcomed with these wonderful and

rapturous words, familiarity with which has deadened our sense of their

greatness. How audacious they would sound to some of their first

hearers! Think of these two, one of them a young Galilean carpenter, to

whom His companion witnesses and declares that He is of worldwide and

infinite significance. It was the first public designation of Jesus

Christ, and it throws into exclusive prominence one aspect of His work.

John the Baptist summing up the whole of former revelation which

concentrated in Him, pointed a designating finger to Jesus and said,

That is He!' My text is the sum of all Christian teaching ever since.

My task, and that of all preachers, if we understand it aright, is but

to repeat the same message, and to concentrate attention on the same

fact--The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.' It is

the one thing needful for you, dear friend, to believe. It is the truth

that we all need most of all. There is no reason for our being gathered

together now, except that I may beseech you to behold for yourselves

the Lamb of God which takes away the world's sin.

I. Now let me ask you to note, first, that Jesus Christ is the world's

sin-bearer.

The significance of the first clause of my text, the Lamb of God,' is

deplorably weakened if it is taken to mean only, or mainly, that Jesus

Christ, in the sweetness of His human nature, is gentle and meek and

patient and innocent and pure. It does mean all that, thank God! But it

was no mere description of Christ's disposition which John the Baptist

conceived himself to be uttering, as is clear by the words that follow

in the next clause. His reason for selecting (under divine guidance, as

I believe) that image of the Lamb of God,' went a great deal deeper

than anything in the temper of the Person of whom he was speaking. Many

streams of ancient prophecy and ritual converge upon this emblem, and

if we want to understand what is meant by the designation the Lamb of

God,' we must not content ourselves with the sentimentalisms which some

superficial teachers have supposed to exhaust the significance of the

expression; but we must submit to be led back by John, who was the

summing up of all the ancient Revelation, to the sources in that

Revelation from which he drew this metaphor.

First and chiefest of these, as I take it, are the words which no Jew

ever doubted referred to the Messiah, until after He had come, and the

Rabbis would not believe in Him, and so were bound to hunt up another

interpretation--I mean the great words in the prophecy which, I

suppose, is familiar to most of us, where there are found two

representations, one, He was led as a Lamb to the slaughter, and as a

sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth'; and the

other, still more germane to the purpose of my text, the Lord hath laid

on Him the iniquity of us all. . . . By His knowledge shall He justify

many, for He shall bear their iniquities.' John the Baptist, looking

back through the ages to that ancient prophetic utterance, points to

the young Man standing by his side, and says, There it is fulfilled.'

But the prophetic symbol of the Lamb, and the thought that He bore the

iniquity of the many, had their roots in the past, and pointed back to

the sacrificial lamb, the lamb of the daily sacrifice, and especially

to the lamb slain at the Passover, which was an emblem and sacrament of

deliverance from bondage. Thus the conceptions of vicarious suffering,

and of a death which is a deliverance, and of blood which, sprinkled on

the doorposts, guards the house from the destroying angel, are all

gathered into these words.

Nor do these exhaust the sources of this figure, as it comes from the

venerable and sacred past. For when we read the Lamb of God,' who is

there that does not recognise, unless his eyes are blinded by obstinate

prejudice, a glance backward to that sweet and pathetic story when the

father went up with his son to the top of Mount Moriah, and to the

boy's question, Where is the lamb?' answered, My son, God Himself will

provide the lamb!' John says, Behold the Lamb that God has provided,

the Sacrifice, on whom is laid a world's sins, and who bears them

away.'

Note, too, the universality of the power of Christ's sacrificial work.

John does not say the sins,' as the Litany, following an imperfect

translation, makes him say. But he says, the sin of the world,' as if

the whole mass of human transgression was bound together, in one black

and awful bundle, and laid upon the unshrinking shoulders of this

better Atlas who can bear it all, and bear it all away. Your sin, and

mine, and every man's, they were all laid upon Jesus Christ.

Now remember, dear brethren, that in this wondrous representation there

lie, plain and distinct, two things which to me, and I pray they may be

to you, are the very foundation of the Gospel to which we have to

trust. One is that on Christ Jesus, in His life and in His death, were

laid the guilt and the consequences of a world's sin. I do not profess

to be ready with an explanation of how that is possible. That it is a

fact I believe, on the authority of Christ Himself and of Scripture;

that it is inconsistent with the laws of human nature may be asserted,

but never can be proved. Theories manifold have been invented in order

to make it plain. I do not know that any of them have gone to the

bottom of the bottomless. But Christ in His perfect manhood, wedded, as

I believe it is, to true divinity, is capable of entering into--not

merely by sympathy, though that has much to do with it--such closeness

of relation with human kind, and with every man, as that on Him can be

laid the iniquity of us all.

Oh, brethren! what was the meaning of I have a baptism to be baptized

with,' unless the cold waters of the flood into which He unshrinkingly

stepped, and allowed to flow over Him, were made by the gathered

accumulation of the sins of the whole world? What was the meaning of

the agony in Gethsemane? What was the meaning of that most awful word

ever spoken by human lips, in which the consciousness of union with,

and of separation from, God, were so marvellously blended, My God! my

God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?' unless the Guiltless was then loaded

with the sins of the world, which rose between Him and God?

Dear friends, it seems to me that unless this transcendent element be

fairly recognised as existing in the passion and death of Jesus Christ,

His demeanour when He came to die was far less heroic and noble and

worthy of imitation than have been the deaths of hundreds of people who

drew all their strength to die from Him. I do not venture to bring a

theory, but I press upon you the fact, He bears the sins of the world,

and in that awful load are yours and mine.

There is the other truth here, as clearly, and perhaps more directly,

meant by the selection of the expression in my text, that the

Sin-bearer not only carries, but carries away, the burden that is laid

upon Him. Perhaps there may be a reference--in addition to the other

sources of the figure which I have indicated as existing in ritual, and

prophecy, and history--there may be a reference in the words to yet

another of the eloquent symbols of that ancient system which enshrined

truths that were not peculiar to any people, but were the property of

humanity. You remember, no doubt, the singular ceremonial connected

with the scapegoat, and many of you will recall the wonderful

embodiment of it given by the Christian genius of a modern painter. The

sins of the nation were symbolically laid upon its head, and it was

carried out to the edge of the wilderness and driven forth to wander

alone, bearing away upon itself into the darkness and solitude--far

from man and far from God--the whole burden of the nation's sins. Jesus

Christ takes away the sin which He bears, and there is, as I believe,

only one way by which individuals, or society, or the world at large,

can thoroughly get rid of the guilt and penal consequences and of the

dominion of sin, and that is, by beholding the Lamb of God that takes

upon Himself, that He may carry away out of sight, the sin of the

world. So much, then, for the first thought that I wish to suggest to

you.

II. Now let me ask you to look with me at a second thought, that such a

world's Sin-bearer is the world's deepest need.

The sacrifices of every land witness to the fact that humanity all over

the world, and through all the ages, and under all varieties of

culture, has been dimly conscious that its deepest need was that the

fact of sin should be dealt with. I know that there are plenty of

modern ingenious ways of explaining the universal prevalence of an

altar and a sacrifice, and the slaying of innocent creatures, on other

grounds, some of which I think it is not uncharitable to suppose are in

favour mainly because they weaken this branch of the evidence for the

conformity of Christian truth with human necessities. But

notwithstanding these, I venture to affirm, with all proper submission

to wiser men, that you cannot legitimately explain the universal

prevalence of sacrifice, unless you take into account as one--I should

say the main--element in it, this universally diffused sense that

things are wrong between man and the higher Power, and need to be set

right even by such a method.

But I do not need to appeal only to this world-wide fact as being a

declaration of what man's deepest need is. I would appeal to every

man's own consciousness--hard though it be to get at it; buried as it

is, with some of us, under mountains of indifference and neglect; and

callous as it is with many of us by reason of indulgence in habits of

evil. I believe that in every one of us, if we will be honest, and give

heed to the inward voice, there does echo a response and an amen to the

Scripture declaration, God hath shut up all under sin.' I ask you about

yourselves, is it not so? Do you not know that, however you may gloss

over the thing, or forget it amidst a whirl of engagements and

occupations, or try to divert your thoughts into more or less noble or

ignoble channels of pleasures and pursuits, there does lie, in each of

our hearts, the sense, dormant often, but sometimes like a snake in its

hybernation, waking up enough to move, and sometimes enough to

sting--there does lie, in each of us, the consciousness that we are

wrong with God, and need something to put us right?

And, brethren, let modern philanthropists of all sorts take this

lesson: The thing that the world wants is to have sin dealt with--dealt

with in the way of conscious forgiveness; dealt with in the way of

drying up its source, and delivering men from the power of it. Unless

you do that, I do not say you do nothing, but you pour a bottle full of

cold water into Vesuvius, and try to put the fire out with that. You

may educate, you may cultivate, you may refine; you may set political

and economical arrangements right in accordance with the newest notions

of the century, and what then? Why! the old thing will just begin over

again, and the old miseries will appear again, because the old

grandmother of them all is there, the sin that has led to them.

Now do not misunderstand me, as if I were warring against good and

noble men who are trying to remedy the world's evils by less thorough

methods than Christ's Gospel. They will do a great deal. But you may

have high education, beautiful refinement of culture and manners; you

may divide out political power in accordance with the most democratic

notions; you may give everybody a living wage,' however extravagant his

notions of a living wage may be. You may carry out all these panaceas

and the world will groan still, because you have not dealt with the

tap-root of all the mischief. You cannot cure an internal cancer with a

plaster upon the little finger, and you will never stanch the world's

wounds until you go to the Physician that has balm and bandage, even

Jesus Christ, that takes away the sins of the world. I profoundly

distrust all these remedies for the world's misery as in themselves

inadequate, even whilst I would help them all, and regard them all as

then blessed and powerful, when they are consequences and secondary

results of the Gospel, the first task of which is to deal by

forgiveness and by cleansing with individual transgression.

And if I might venture to go a step further, I would like to say that

this aspect of our Lord's work on which John the Baptist concentrated

all our attention is the only one which gives Him power to sway men,

and which makes the Gospel--the record of His work--the kingly power in

the world that it is meant to be. Depend upon it, that in the measure

in which Christian teachers fail to give supreme importance to that

aspect of Christ's work they fail altogether. There are many other

aspects which, as I have just said, follow in my conception from this

first one; but if, as is obviously the tendency in many quarters

to-day, Christianity be thought of as being mainly a means of social

improvement, or if its principles of action be applied to life without

that basis of them all, in the Cross which takes away the world's

iniquity, then it needs no prophet to foretell that such a Christianity

will only have superficial effects, and that, in losing sight of this

central thought, it will have cast away all its power.

I beseech you, dear brethren, remember that Jesus Christ is something

more than a social reformer, though He is the first of them, and the

only one whose work will last. Jesus Christ is something more than a

lovely pattern of human conduct, though He is that. Jesus Christ is

something more than a great religious genius who set forth the

Fatherhood of God as it had never been set forth before. The Gospel of

Jesus Christ is the record not only of what He said but of what He did,

not only that He lived but that He died; and all His other powers, and

all His other benefits and blessings to society, come as results of His

dealing with the individual soul when He takes away its guilt and

reconciles it to God.

III. And so, lastly, let me ask you to notice that this Sin-bearer of

the world is our Sin-bearer if we behold' Him.

John was simply summoning ignorant eyes to look, and telling of what

they would see. But his call is susceptible, without violence, of a far

deeper meaning. This is really the one truth that I want to press upon

you, dear friends--Behold the Lamb of God!'

What is that beholding? Surely it is nothing else than our recognising

in Him the great and blessed work which I have been trying to describe,

and then resting ourselves upon that great Lord and sufficient

Sacrifice. And such an exercise of simple trust is well named

beholding, because they who believe do see, with a deeper and a truer

vision than sense can give. You and I can see Christ more really than

these men who stood round Him, and to whom His flesh was a veil'--as

the Epistle to the Hebrews calls it--hiding His true divinity and work.

They who thus behold by faith lack nothing either of the directness or

of the certitude that belong to vision. Seeing is believing,' says the

cynical proverb. The Christian version inverts its terms, Believing is

seeing.' Whom having not seen ye love, in whom though now ye see Him

not, yet believing ye rejoice.'

And your simple act of beholding,' by the recognition of His work and

the resting of yourself upon it, makes the world's Sin-bearer your

Sin-bearer. You appropriate the general blessing, like a man taking in

a little piece of a boundless prairie for his very own. Your possession

does not make my possession of Him less, for every eye gets its own

beam, and however many eyes wait upon Him, they all receive the light

on to their happy eyeballs. You can make Christ your own, and have all

that He has done for the world as your possession, and can experience

in your own hearts the sense of your own forgiveness and deliverance

from the power and guilt of your own sin, on the simple condition of

looking unto Jesus. The serpent is lifted on the pole, the dying camp

cannot go to it, but the filming eyes of the man in his last gasp may

turn to the gleaming image hanging on high; and as he looks the health

begins to tingle back into his veins, and he is healed.

And so, dear brethren, behold Him; for unless you do, though He has

borne the world's sin, your sin will not be there, but will remain on

your back to crush you down. O Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins

of the world, have mercy upon me!'

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THE FIRST DISCIPLES: I. JOHN AND ANDREW

And the two disciples heard Him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38.

Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What

seek ye? They said unto Him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being

interpreted, Master,) where dwellest Thou? 39. He saith unto them, Come

and see. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day:

for it was about the tenth hour.'--JOHN i. 37-39.

In these verses we see the head waters of a great river, for we have

before us nothing less than the beginnings of the Christian Church. So

simply were the first disciples made. The great society of believers

was born like its Master, unostentatiously and in a corner.

Jesus has come back from His conflict in the wilderness after His

baptism, and has presented Himself before John the Baptist for his

final attestation. It was a great historical moment when the last of

the Prophets stood face to face with the Fulfilment of all prophecy. In

his words, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the

world!' Jewish prophecy sang its swan-song, uttered its last rejoicing,

Eureka! I have found Him!' and died as it spoke.

We do not sufficiently estimate the magnificent self-suppression and

unselfishness of the Baptist, in that he, with his own lips, here

repeats his testimony in order to point his disciples away from

himself, and to attach them to Jesus. If he could have been touched by

envy he would not so gladly have recognised it as his lot to decrease

while Jesus increased. Bare magnanimity that in a teacher! The two who

hear John's words are Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, and an anonymous

man. The latter is probably the Evangelist. For it is remarkable that

we never find the names of James and John in this Gospel (though from

the other Gospels we know how closely they were associated with our

Lord), and that we only find them referred to as the sons of Zebedee,'

once near the close of the book. That fact points, I think, in the

direction of John's authorship of this Gospel.

These two, then, follow behind Jesus, fancying themselves unobserved,

not desiring to speak to Him, and probably with some notion of tracking

Him to His home, in order that they may seek an interview at a later

period. But He who notices the first beginnings of return to Him, and

always comes to meet men, and is better to them than their wishes, will

not let them steal behind Him uncheered, nor leave them to struggle

with diffidence and delay. So He turns to them, and the events ensue

which I have read in the verses that follow as my text.

We have, I think, three things especially to notice here. First, the

Master's question to the whole world, What seek ye?' Second, the

Master's invitation to the whole world, Come and see!' Lastly, the

personal communion which brings men's hearts to Him, They came and saw

where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day.'

I. So, then, first look at this question of Christ to the whole world,

What seek ye?'

As it stands, on its surface, and in its primary application, it is the

most natural of questions. Our Lord hears footsteps behind Him, and, as

any one would do, turns about, with the question which any one would

ask, What is it that you want?' That question would derive all its

meaning from the look with which it was accompanied, and the tone in

which it was spoken. It might mean either annoyance and rude repulsion

of a request, even before it was presented, or it might mean a glad

wish to draw out the petition, and more than half a pledge to bestow

it. All depends on the smile with which it was asked and the intonation

of voice which carried it to their ears. And if we had been there we

should have felt, as these two evidently felt, that though in form a

question, it was in reality a promise, and that it drew out their shy

wishes, made them conscious to themselves of what they desired, and

gave them confidence that their desire would be granted. Clearly it had

sunk very deep into the Evangelist's mind; and now, at the end of his

life, when his course is nearly run, the never-to-be-forgotten voice

sounds still in his memory, and he sees again, in sunny clearness, all

the scene that had transpired on that day by the fords of the Jordan.

The first words and the last words of those whom we have learned to

love are cut deep on our hearts.

It was not an accident that the first words which the Master spoke in

His Messianic office were this profoundly significant question, What

seek ye?' He asks it of us all, He asks it of us to-day. Well for them

who can answer, Rabbi! where dwellest Thou?' It is Thou whom we seek!'

So, venturing to take the words in that somewhat wider application, let

me just suggest to you two or three directions in which they seem to

point.

First, the question suggests to us this: the need of having a clear

consciousness of what is our object in life. The most of men have never

answered that question. They live from hand to mouth, driven by

circumstances, guided by accidents, impelled by unreflecting passions

and desires, knowing what they want for the moment, but never having

tried to shape the course of their lives into a consistent whole, so as

to stand up before God in Christ when He puts the question to them,

What seek ye?' and to answer the question.

These incoherent, instinctive, unreflective lives that so many of you

are living are a shame to your manhood, to say nothing more. God has

made us for something else than that we should thus be the sport of

circumstances. It is a disgrace to any of us that our lives should be

like some little fishing-boat, with an unskilful or feeble hand at the

tiller, yawing from one point of the compass to another, and not

keeping a straight and direct course. I pray you, dear brethren, to

front this question: After all, and at bottom, what is it I am living

for? Can I formulate the aims and purposes of my life in any

intelligible statement of which I should not be ashamed?' Some of you

are not ashamed to do what you would be very much ashamed to say, and

you practically answer the question, What are you seeking?' by pursuits

that you durst not call by their own ugly names.

There may be many of us who are living for our lusts, for our passions,

for our ambitions, for avarice, who are living in all uncleanness and

godlessness. I do not know. There are plenty of shabby, low aims in all

of us which do not bear being dragged out into the light of day. I

beseech you to try and get hold of the ugly things and bring them up to

the surface, however much they may seek to hide in the congenial

obscurity and twist their slimy coils round something in the dark. If

you dare not put your life's object into words, bethink yourselves

whether it ought to be your life's object at all.

Ah, brethren! if we would ask ourselves this question, and answer it

with any thoroughness, we should not make so many mistakes as to the

places where we look for the things for which we are seeking. If we

knew what we were really seeking, we should know where to go to look

for it. Let me tell you what you are seeking, whether you know it or

not. You are seeking for rest for your heart, a home for your spirits;

you are seeking for perfect truth for your understandings, perfect

beauty for your affections, perfect goodness for your conscience. You

are seeking for all these three, gathered into one white beam of light,

and you are seeking for it all in a Person. Many of you do not know

this, and so you go hunting in all manner of impossible places for that

which you can only find in one. To the question, What seek ye?' the

deepest of all answers, the only real answer, is, My soul thirsteth for

God, for the living God.' If you know that, you know where to look for

what you need! Do men gather grapes of thorns?' If these are really the

things that you are seeking after, in all your mistaken search--oh! how

mistaken is the search! Do men look for pearls in cockle-shells, or for

gold in coal-pits; and why should you look for rest of heart, mind,

conscience, spirit, anywhere and in anything short of God? What seek

ye?'--the only answer is, We seek Thee!'

And then, still further, let me remind you how these words are not only

a question, but are really a veiled and implied promise. The question,

What do you want of Me?' may either strike an intending suppliant like

a blow, and drive him away with his prayer sticking in his throat

unspoken, or it may sound like a merciful invitation, What is thy

petition, and what is thy request, and it shall be granted unto thee?'

We know which of the two it was here. Christ asks all such questions as

this (and there are many of them in the New Testament), not for His

information, but for our strengthening. He asks people, not because He

does not know before they answer, but that, on the one hand, their own

minds may be clear as to their wishes, and so they may wish the more

earnestly because of the clearness; and that, on the other hand, their

desires being expressed, they may be the more able to receive the gift

which He is willing to bestow. So He here turns to these men, whose

purpose He knew well enough, and says to them, What seek ye?' Herein He

is doing the very same thing on a lower level, and in an outer sphere,

as is done when He appoints that we shall pray for the blessings which

He is yearning to bestow, but which He makes conditional on our

supplications, only because by these supplications our hearts are

opened to a capacity for receiving them.

We have, then, in the words before us, thus understood, our Lord's

gracious promise to give what is desired on the simple condition that

the suppliant is conscious of his own wants, and turns to Him for the

supply of them. What seek ye?' It is a blank cheque that He puts into

their hands to fill up. It is the key of His treasure-house which He

offers to us all, with the assured confidence that if we open it we

shall find all that we need.

Who is He that thus stands up before a whole world of seeking, restless

spirits, and fronts them with the question which is a pledge, conscious

of His capacity to give to each of them what each of them requires? Who

is this that professes to be able to give all these men and women and

children bread here in the wilderness? There is only one answer--the

Christ of God.

And He has done what He promises. No man or woman ever went to Him, and

answered this question, and presented their petition for any real good,

and was refused. No man can ask from Christ what Christ cannot bestow.

No man can ask from Christ what Christ will not bestow. In the loftiest

region, the region of inward and spiritual gifts, which are the best

gifts, we can get everything that we want, and our only limit is, not

His boundless omnipotence and willingness, but our own poor, narrow,

and shrivelled desires. Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall

find.'

Christ stands before us, if I may so say, like some of those fountains

erected at some great national festival, out of which pour for all the

multitude every variety of draught which they desire, and each man that

goes with his empty cup gets it filled, and gets it filled with that

which he wishes. What seek ye?' Wisdom? You students, you thinkers, you

young men that are fighting with intellectual difficulties and

perplexities, What seek ye?' Truth? He gives us that. You others, What

seek ye?' Love, peace, victory, self-control, hope, anodyne for sorrow?

Whatever you desire, you will find in Jesus Christ. The first words

with which He broke the silence when He spake to men as the Messias,

were at once a searching question, probing their aims and purposes, and

a gracious promise pledging Him to a task not beyond His power, however

far beyond that of all others, even the task of giving to each man his

heart's desire. What seek ye?' Seek, and ye shall find.'

II. Then, still further, notice how, in a similar fashion, we may

regard here the second words which our Lord speaks as being His

merciful invitation to the world. Come and see.'

The disciples' answer was simple and timid. They did not venture to

say, May we talk to you?' Will you take us to be your disciples?' All

they can muster courage to ask now is, Where dwellest Thou?' At another

time, perhaps, we will go to this Rabbi and speak with Him. His answer

is, Come, come now; come, and by intercourse with Me learn to know Me.'

His temporary home was probably nothing more than some selected place

on the river's bank, for He had not where to lay His head'; but such as

it was, He welcomes them to it. Come and see!'

Take a plain, simple truth out of that. Christ is always glad when

people resort to Him. When He was here in the world, no hour was

inconvenient or inopportune; no moment was too much occupied; no

physical wants of hunger, or thirst, or slumber were ever permitted to

come between Him and seeking hearts. He was never impatient. He was

never wearied of speaking, though He was often wearied in speaking. He

never denied Himself to any one or said, I have something else to do

than to attend to you.' And just as in literal fact, whilst He was here

upon earth, nothing was ever permitted to hinder His drawing near to

any man who wanted to draw near to Him, so nothing now hinders it; and

He is glad when any of us resort to Him and ask Him to let us speak to

Him and be with Him. His weariness or occupation never shut men out

from Him then. His glory does not shut them out now.

Then there is another thought here. This invitation of the Master is

also a very distinct call to a firsthand knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Andrew and John had heard from the Baptist about Him, and now what He

bids them to do is to come and hear Himself. That is what He calls you,

dear brethren, to do. Do not listen to us, let the Master Himself speak

to you. Many who reject Christianity reject it through not having

listened to Jesus Himself teaching them, but only to theologians and

other human representations of the truth. Go and ask Christ to speak to

you with His own lips of truth, and take Him as the Expositor of His

own system. Do not be contented with traditional talk and second-hand

information. Go to Christ, and hear what He Himself has to say to you.

Then, still further, in this Come and see' there is a distinct call to

the personal act of faith. Both of these words, come' and see,' are

used in the New Testament as standing emblems of faith. Coming to

Christ is trusting Him; trusting Him is seeing Him, looking unto Him.

Come unto Me, and I will give you rest,' Look unto Me, and be ye saved,

all ye ends of the earth.' There are two metaphors, both of them

pointing to one thing, and that one thing is the invitation from the

dear lips of the loving Lord to every man, woman, and child in this

congregation. Come and see!' Put your trust in Me, draw near to Me by

desire and penitence, draw near to Me in the fixed thought of your

mind, in the devotion of your will, in the trust of your whole being.

Come to Me, and see Me by faith; and then--and then--your hearts will

have found what they seek, and your weary quest will be over, and, like

the dove, you will fold your wings and nestle at the foot of the Cross,

and rest for evermore. Come! "Come and see!"'

III. So, lastly, we have in these words a parable of the blessed

experience which binds men's hearts to Jesus for ever. They came and

saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day, for it was about the

tenth hour.'

Dwelt' and abode' are the same words in the original. It is one of

John's favourite words, and in its deepest meaning expresses the close,

still communion which the soul may have with Jesus Christ, which

communion, on that never-to-be-forgotten day, when he and Andrew sat

with Him in the quiet, confidential fellowship that disclosed Christ's

glory full of grace and truth' to their hearts, made them His for ever.

If the reckoning of time here is made according to the Hebrew fashion,

the tenth hour' will be ten o'clock in the morning. So, one long day of

talk! If it be according to the Roman legal fashion, the hour will be

four o'clock in the afternoon, which would only give time for a brief

conversation before the night fell. But, in any case, sacred reserve is

observed as to what passed in that interview. A lesson for a great deal

of blatant talk, in this present day, about conversion and the details

thereof!

Not easily forgiven

Are those, who setting wide the doors, that bar

The secret bridal chambers of the heart.

Let in the day.'

John had nothing to say to the world about what the Master said to him

and his brother in that long day of communion.

One plain conclusion from this last part of our narrative is that the

impression of Christ's own personality is the strongest force to make

disciples. The character of Jesus Christ is, after all, the central and

standing evidence and the mightiest credential of Christianity. It

bears upon its face the proof of its own truthfulness. If such a

character was not lived, how did it ever come to be described, and

described by such people? And if it was lived, how did it come to be

so? The historical veracity of the character of Jesus Christ is

guaranteed by its very uniqueness. And the divine origin of Jesus

Christ is forced upon us as the only adequate explanation of His

historical character. Truly this man was the Son of God.'

I believe that to lift Him up is the work of all Christian preachers

and teachers; as far as they can to hide themselves behind Jesus

Christ, or at the most to let themselves appear, just as the old

painters used to let their own likenesses appear in their great

altar-pieces--a little kneeling figure there, away in a dark corner of

the background. Present Christ, and He will vindicate His own

character; He will vindicate His own nature; He will vindicate His own

gospel. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him,' and the

end of it was that they abode with Him for evermore. And so it will

always be.

Once more, personal experience of the grace and sweetness of this

Saviour binds men to Him as nothing else will:

He must be loved ere that to you

He will seem worthy of your love.'

The deepest and sweetest and most precious part of His character and of

His gifts can only be known on condition of possessing Him and them,

and they can be possessed only on condition of holding fellowship with

Him. I do not say to any man: Try trust in order to be sure that Jesus

Christ is worthy to be trusted,' for by its very nature faith cannot be

an experiment or provisional. I do not say that my experience is

evidence to you, but at the same time I do say that it is worth any

man's while to reflect upon this, that none who ever trusted in Him

have been put to shame. No man has looked to Jesus and has said: Ah! I

have found Him out! His help is vain, His promises empty.' Many men

have fallen away from Him, I know, but not because they have proved Him

untruthful, but because they have become unfaithful.

And so, dear brethren, I come to you with the old message, Oh! taste,'

and thus you will see that the Lord is good.' There must be the faith

first, and then there will be the experience, which will make anything

seem to you more credible than that He whom you have loved and trusted,

and who has answered your love and your trust, should be anything else

than the Son of God, the Saviour of mankind. Come to Him and you will

see. The impregnable argument will be put into your mouth--Whether this

man be a sinner or no, I know not. One thing I know, that whereas I was

blind, now I see.' Look to Him, listen to Him, and when He asks you,

What seek ye?' answer, Rabbi, where dwellest Thou? It is Thou whom I

seek.' He will welcome you to close blessed intercourse with Him, which

will knit you to Him with cords that cannot be broken, and with His

loving voice making music in memory and heart, you will be able

triumphantly to confess--Now we believe, not because of any man's

saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed

the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

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THE FIRST DISCIPLES: II. SIMON PETER

One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew,

Simon Peter's brother. 41. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and

saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted,

the Christ. 42. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him,

He said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas,

which is, by interpretation, a stone.'--JOHN i. 40-42.

There are many ways by which souls are brought to their Saviour.

Sometimes, like the merchantman seeking goodly pearls, men seek Him

earnestly and find Him. Sometimes, by the intervention of another, the

knowledge of Him is kindled in dark hearts. Sometimes He Himself takes

the initiative, and finds those that seek Him not. We have

illustrations of all these various ways in these simple records of the

gathering in of the first disciples. Andrew and his friend, with whom

we were occupied in our last sermon, looked for Christ and found Him.

Peter, with whom we have to do now, was brought to Christ by his

brother; and the third of the group, consisting of Philip, was sought

by Christ while he was not thinking of Him, and found an unsought

treasure; and then Philip again, like Andrew, finds a friend, and

brings him to Christ.

Each of the incidents has its own lesson, and each of them adds

something to the elucidation of John's two great subjects: the

revelation of Jesus as the Son of God, and the development of that

faith in Him which gives us life. It may be profitable to consider each

group in succession, and mark the various aspects of these two subjects

presented by each.

In this incident, then, we have two things mainly to consider: first,

the witness of the disciple; second, the self-revelation of the Master.

I. The witness of the disciple.

We have seen that the unknown companion of Andrew was probably the

Evangelist himself, who, in accordance with his uniform habit,

suppresses his own name, and that that omission points to John's

authorship of this Gospel. Another morsel of evidence as to the date

and purpose of the Gospel lies in the mention here of Andrew as Simon

Peter's brother.' We have not yet heard anything about Simon Peter. The

Evangelist has never mentioned his name, and yet he takes it for

granted that his hearers knew all about Peter, and knew him better than

they did Andrew. That presupposes a considerable familiarity with the

incidents of the Gospel story, and is in harmony with the theory that

this fourth Gospel is the latest of the four, and was written for the

purpose of supplementing, not of repeating, their narrative. Hence a

number of the phenomena of the Gospel, which have troubled critics, are

simply and sufficiently explained.

But that by the way. Passing that, notice first the illustration that

we get here of how instinctive and natural the impulse is, when a man

has found Jesus Christ, to tell some one else about Him. Nobody said to

Andrew, Go and look for your brother,' and yet, as soon as he had

fairly realised the fact that this Man standing before him was the

Messiah, though the evening seems to have come, he hurries away to find

his brother, and share with him the glad conviction.

Now, that is always the case. If a man has any real depth of

conviction, he cannot rest till he tries to share it with somebody

else. Why, even a dog that has had its leg mended, will bring other

limping dogs to the man that was kind to it. Whoever really believes

anything becomes a propagandist.

Look round about us to-day! and hearken to the Babel, the wholesale

Babel of noises, where every sort of opinion is trying to make itself

heard. It sounds like a country fair where every huckster is shouting

his loudest. That shows that the men believe the things that they

profess. Thank God that there is so much earnestness in the world! And

now are Christians to be dumb whilst all this vociferous crowd is

calling its wares, and quacks are standing on their platforms shouting

out their specifics, which are mostly delusions? Have you not a

medicine that will cure everything, a real heal-all, a veritable

pain-killer? If you believe that you have, certainly you will never

rest till you share your boon with your brethren.

If the natural effect of all earnest conviction, viz. a yearning and an

absolute necessity to speak it out, is no part of your Christian

experience, very grave inferences ought to be drawn from that. This

man, before he was four-and-twenty hours a disciple, had made another.

Some of you have been disciples for as many years, and have never even

tried to make one. Whence comes that silence which is, alas, so common

among us?

It is very plain that, making all allowance for changed manners, for

social difficulties, for timidity, for the embarrassment that besets

people when they talk to other people about religion, which is such an

awkward subject to introduce into mixed company,' and the like,--making

all allowance for these, there is a deplorable number of Christian

people who ought to be, in their own circles, evangelists and

missionaries, who are, if I may venture to quote very rude words which

the Bible uses, Dumb dogs lying down, and loving to slumber.' He first

findeth his own brother, Simon!'

Now, take another lesson out of this witness of the disciple, as to the

channel in which such effort naturally runs. He first findeth his own

brother'; does not that imply a second finding by the other of the two?

The language of the text suggests that the Evangelist's tendency to the

suppression of himself, of which I have spoken, hides away, if I may so

say, in this singular expression, the fact that he too went to look for

a brother, but that Andrew found his brother before John found his. If

so, each of the original pair of disciples went to look for one who was

knit to him by close ties of kindred and affection, and found him and

brought him to Christ; and before the day was over the Christian Church

was doubled, because each member of it, by God's grace, had added

another. Home, then, and those who are nearest to us, present the

natural channels for Christian work. Many a very earnest and busy

preacher, or Sunday-school teacher, or missionary, has brothers and

sisters, husband or wife, children or parents at home to whom he has

never said a word about Christ. There is an old proverb, The

shoemaker's wife is always the worst shod.' The families of many very

busy Christian teachers suffer wofully for want of remembering he first

findeth his own brother.' It is a poor affair if all your philanthropy

and Christian energy go off noisily in Sunday-schools and

mission-stations, and if your own vineyard is neglected, and the people

at your own fireside never hear anything from you about the Master whom

you say you love. Some of you want that hint; will you take it?

But then, the principle is one that might be fairly expanded beyond the

home circle. The natural relationships into which we are brought by

neighbourhood and by ordinary associations prescribe the direction of

our efforts. What, for instance, are we set down in this swarming

population of Lancashire for? For business and personal ends? Yes,

partly. But is that all? Surely, if we believe that there is a divinity

that shapes our ends' and determines the bounds of our habitation, we

must believe that other purposes affecting other people are also meant

by God to be accomplished through us, and that where a man who knows

and loves Christ Jesus is brought into neighbourly contact with

thousands who do not, he is thereby constituted his brethren's keeper,

and is as plainly called to tell them of Christ as if a voice from

Heaven had bid him do it. What is to be said of the depth and vital

energy of the Christianity that neither hears the call nor feels the

impulse to share its blessing with the famishing Lazarus at its gate?

What will be the fate of such a church? Why, if you live in luxury in

your own well drained and ventilated house, and take no heed to the

typhoid fever or cholera in the slums at its back, the chances are that

seeds of the disease will find their way to you, and kill your wife, or

child, or yourself. And if you Christian people, living in the midst of

godless people, do not try to heal them, they will infect you. If you

do not seek to impress your conviction that Christ is the Messiah upon

an unbelieving generation, the unbelieving generation will impress upon

you its doubts whether He is; and your lips will falter, and a pallor

will come over the complexion of your love, and your faith will become

congealed and turn into ice.

Notice again the simple word which is the most powerful means of

influencing most men.

Andrew did not begin to argue with his brother. Some of us can do that

and some of us cannot. Some of us are influenced by argument and some

of us are not. You may pound a man's mistaken creed to atoms with

sledge-hammers of reasoning, and he is not much the nearer being a

Christian than he was before; just as you may pound ice to pieces and

it is pounded ice after all. The mightiest argument that we can use,

and the argument that we can all use, if we have got any religion in us

at all, is that of Andrew, We have found the Messias.'

I recently read a story in some newspaper or other about a minister who

preached a very elaborate course of lectures in refutation of some form

of infidelity, for the special benefit of a man that attended his place

of worship. Soon after, the man came and declared himself a Christian.

The minister said to him, Which of my discourses was it that removed

your doubts?' The reply was, Oh! it was not any of your sermons that

influenced me. The thing that set me thinking was that a poor woman

came out of the chapel beside me, and stumbled on the steps, and I

stretched out my hand to help her, and she said "Thank you!" Then she

looked at me and said, "Do you love Jesus Christ, my blessed Saviour?"

And I did not, and I went home and thought about it; and now I can say

I love Jesus.' The poor woman's word, and her frank confession of her

experience, were all the transforming power.

If you have found Christ, you can say that you have. Never mind about

the how! Any how! Only say it! A boy that is sent on an errand by his

father has only one duty to perform, and that is to repeat what he was

told. Whether we have any eloquence or not, whether we have any logic

or not, whether we can speak persuasively and gracefully or not, if we

have laid hold of Christ at all we can say that we have; and it is at

our peril that we do not. We can say it to somebody. There is surely

some one who will listen to you more readily than to any one else.

Surely you have not lived all your life and bound nobody to you by

kindness and love, so that they will gladly attend to what you say.

Well, then, use the power that is given to you.

Remember the beginnings of the Christian Church--two men, each of whom

found his brother. Two and two make four; and if every one of us would

go, according to the old law of warfare, and each of us slay our man,

or rather each of us give life by God's grace to some one, or try to do

it, our congregations and our churches would grow as fast as, according

to the old problem, the money grew that was paid down for the nails in

the horse's shoes. Two snowflakes on the top of a mountain gather an

avalanche by the time they reach the valley. He first findeth his

brother, Simon.'

II. And now I turn to the second part of this text, the self-revelation

of the Master.

The bond which knit these men to Christ at first was by no means the

perfect Christian faith which they afterwards attained. They recognised

Him as the Messiah, they were personally attached to Him, they were

ready to accept His teaching and to obey His commandments. That was

about as far as they had gone. But they were scholars. They had entered

the school. The rest would come. It would be absurd to expect that

Christ would begin by preaching to them faith in His divinity and

atoning work. He binds them to Himself. That is lesson enough for a

beginner for one day.

It was the impression which Christ Himself made on Simon which

completed the work begun by his brother. What, then, was the

impression? He comes all full of wonder and awe, and he is met by a

look and a sentence. The look, which is described by an unusual word,

was a penetrating gaze which regarded Peter with fixed attention. It

must have been remarkable, to have lived in John's memory for all these

years. Evidently, as I think, a more than natural insight is implied.

So, also, the saying with which our Lord received Peter seems to me to

be meant to show more than natural knowledge: Thou art Simon, the son

of Jonas.' Christ may, no doubt, have learned the Apostle's name and

lineage from his brother, or in some other ordinary way. But if you

observe the similar incident which follows in the conversation with

Nicodemus, and the emphatic declaration of the next chapter that Jesus

knew both all men,' and what was in man'--both human nature as a whole,

and each individual--it is more natural to see here superhuman

knowledge.

So then, the first point in our Lord's self-revelation here is that He

shows Himself possessed of supernatural and thorough knowledge. One

remembers the many instances where our Lord read men's hearts, and the

prayer addressed to Him probably, by Peter, Thou, Lord, which knowest

the hearts of all men,' and the vision which John saw of eyes like a

flame of fire,' and the sevenfold I know thy works.'

It may be a very awful thought, Thou, God, seest me.' It is a very

unwelcome thought to a great many men, and it will be so to us unless

we can give it the modification which it receives from the belief in

the divinity of Jesus Christ, and feel sure that the eyes which are

blazing with divine omniscience are dewy with divine and human love.

Do you believe it? Do you feel that Christ is looking at you, and

searching you altogether? Do you rejoice in it? Do you carry it about

with you as a consolation and a strength in moments of weakness and in

times of temptation? Is it as blessed to you to feel Thou Christ

beholdest me now,' as it is for a child to feel that, when it is

playing in the garden, its mother is sitting up at the window watching

it, and that no harm can come? There have been men driven mad in

prisons because they knew that somewhere in the wall there was a little

pinhole, through which a gaoler's eye was always, or might be always,

glaring down at them. And the thought of an absolute Omniscience up

there, searching me to the depths of my nature, may become one from

which I recoil shudderingly, and will not be altogether a blessed one

unless it comes to me in this shape:--My Christ knows me altogether and

loves me better than He knows. And so I will spread myself out before

Him, and though I feel that there is much in me which I dare not tell

to men, I will rejoice that there is nothing which I need to tell to

Him. He knows me through and through. He knew me when He died for me.

He knew me when He forgave me. He knew me when He undertook to cleanse

me. Like this very Peter I will say, "Lord, Thou knowest all things,"

and, like him, I will cling the closer to His feet, because I know, and

He knows, my weakness and my sin.'

Another revelation of our Lord's relation to His disciples is given in

the fact that He changes Simon's name. Jehovah, in the Old Testament,

changes the names of Abraham and of Jacob. Babylonian kings in the Old

Testament change the names of their vassal princes. Masters impose

names on their slaves; and I suppose that even the marriage custom of

the wife's assuming the name of the husband rests originally upon the

same idea of absolute authority. That idea is conveyed in the fact that

our Lord changes Peter's name, and so takes absolute possession of him,

and asserts His mastery over him. We belong to Him altogether, because

He has given Himself altogether for us. His absolute authority is the

correlative of His utter self-surrender. He who can come to me and say,

I have spared not my life for thee,' and He only, has the right to come

to me and say, yield yourself wholly to Me.' So, Christian friends,

your Master wants all your service; do you give yourselves up to Him

out and out, not by half and half.

Lastly, that change of name implies Christ's power and promise to

bestow a new character and new functions and honours. Peter was by no

means a Peter' then. The name no doubt mainly implies official

function, but that official function was prepared for by personal

character; and in so far as the name refers to character, it means

firmness. At that epoch Peter was rash, impulsive, headstrong,

self-confident, vain, and therefore, necessarily changeable. Like the

granite, all fluid and hot, and fluid because it was hot, he needed to

cool in order to solidify into rock. And not until his self-confidence

had been knocked out of him, and he had learned humility by falling;

not until he had been beaten from all his presumption, and tamed down,

and sobered and steadied by years of difficulty and responsibilities,

did he become the rock that Christ meant him to be. All that lay

concealed in the future, but in the change of his name, while he stood

on the very threshold of his Christian career, there was preached to

him, and there is preached to us, this great truth, that if you will go

to Jesus Christ He will make a new man of you. No man's character is so

obstinately rooted in evil but that Christ can change its set and

direction. No man's natural dispositions are so faulty and low but that

Christ can develop counterbalancing virtues, and out of the evil and

weakness make strength. He will not make a Peter into a John, or a John

into a Paul, but He will deliver Peter from the defects of his

qualities,' and lead them up into a higher and a nobler region. There

are no outcasts in the view of the transforming Christ. He dismisses no

people out of His hospital as incurable, because anybody, everybody,

the blackest, the most rooted in evil, those who have longest indulged

in any given form of transgression, may all come to Him; with the

certainty that if they will cleave to Him, He will read all their

character and all its weaknesses, and then with a glad smile of welcome

and assured confidence on His face, will ensure to them a new nature

and new dignities. Thou art Simon--thou shalt be Peter.'

The process will be long. It will be painful. There will be a great

deal pared off. The sculptor makes the marble image by chipping away

the superfluous marble. Ah! and when you have to chip away superfluous

flesh and blood it is bitter work, and the chisel is often deeply dyed

in gore, and the mallet seems to be very cruel. Simon did not know all

that had to be done to make a Peter of him. We have to thank God's

providence that we do not know all the sorrows and trials of the

process of making us what He wills us to be. But we may be sure of

this, that if only we keep near our Master, and let Him have His way

with us, and work His will upon us, and if only we will not wince from

the blows of the Great Artist's chisel, then out of the roughest block

He will carve the fairest statue; and He will fulfil for us at last His

great promise: I will give unto him a white stone, and in the stone a

new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it.'

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THE FIRST DISCIPLES: III. PHILIP

The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth

Philip, and saith unto him, Follow Me.'--JOHN i. 43.

The day following'--we have a diary in this chapter and the next,

extending from the day when John the Baptist gives his official

testimony to Jesus, up till our Lord's first journey to Jerusalem. The

order of events is this. The deputation from the Sanhedrim to John

occupied the first day. On the second Jesus comes back to John after

His temptation, and receives his solemn attestation. On the third day,

John repeats his testimony, and three disciples, probably four, make

the nucleus of the Church. These are the two pairs of brothers, James

and John, Andrew and Peter, who stand first in every catalogue of the

Apostles, and were evidently nearest to Christ.

The day following' of our text is the fourth day. On it our Lord

determines to return to Galilee. His objects in His visit to John were

accomplished--to receive his public attestation, and to gather the

first little knot of His followers. Thus launched upon His course, He

desired to return to His native district.

These events had occurred where John was baptising, in a place called

in the English version Bethabara, which means The house of crossing,'

or as we might say, Ferry-house. The traditional site for John's

baptism is near Jericho, but the next chapter (verse i.) shows that it

was only a day's journey from Cana of Galilee, and must therefore have

been much further north than Jericho. A ford, still bearing the name

Abarah, a few miles south of the lake of Gennesaret, has lately been

discovered. Our Lord, then, and His disciples had a day's walking to

take them back to Galilee. But apparently before they set out on that

morning, Philip and Nathanael were added to the little band. So these

two days saw six disciples gathered round Jesus.

Andrew and John sought Christ and found Him. To them He revealed

Himself as very willing to be approached, and glad to welcome any to

His side. Peter, who comes next, was brought to Christ by his brother,

and to him Christ revealed Himself as reading his heart, and promising

and giving him higher functions and a more noble character.

Now we come to the third case, Jesus findeth Philip,' who was not

seeking Jesus, and who was brought by no one. To him Christ reveals

Himself as drawing near to many a heart that has not thought of Him,

and laying a masterful hand of gracious authority on the springs of

life and character in that autocratic word Follow Me.' So we have a

gradually heightening revelation of the Master's graciousness to all

souls, to them that seek and to them that seek Him not. It is only to

the working out of these simple thoughts that I ask your attention now.

I. First, then, let us deal with the revelation that is given us here

of the seeking Christ.

Every one who reads this chapter with even the slightest attention must

observe how seeking' and finding' are repeated over and over again.

Christ turns to Andrew and John with the question, What seek ye?'

Andrew, as the narrative says, findeth his own brother, Simon, and

saith unto him, "We have found the Messias!"' Then again, Jesus finds

Philip; and again, Philip, as soon as he has been won to Jesus, goes

off to find Nathanael; and his glad word to him is, once more, We have

found the Messias.' It is a reciprocal play of finding and seeking all

through these verses.

There are two kinds of finding. There is a casual stumbling upon a

thing that you were not looking for, and there is a finding as the

result of seeking. It is the latter which is here. Christ did not

casually stumble upon Philip, upon that morning, before they departed

from the fords of the Jordan on their short journey to Cana of Galilee.

He went to look for this other Galilean, one who was connected with

Andrew and Peter, a native of the same little village. He went and

found him; and whilst Philip was all unexpectant and undesirous, the

Master came to him and laid His hand upon him, and drew him to Himself.

Now that is what Christ often does. There are men like the merchantman

who went all over the world seeking goodly pearls, who with some eager

longing to possess light, or truth, or goodness, or rest, search up and

down and find it nowhere, because they are looking for it in a hundred

different places. They are expecting to find a little here and a little

there, and to piece all together to make of the fragments one

all-sufficing restfulness. Then when they are most eager in their

search, or when, perhaps, it has all died down into despair and apathy,

the veil seems to be withdrawn, and they see Him whom they have been

seeking all the time and knew not that He was there beside them. All,

and more than all, that they sought for in the many pearls is stored

for them in the one Pearl of great price. The ancient covenant stands

firm to-day as for ever. Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be

opened unto you.'

But then there are others, like Paul on the road to Damascus or like

Matthew the publican, sitting at the receipt of custom, on whom there

is laid a sudden hand, to whom there comes a sudden conviction, on

whose eyes, not looking to the East, there dawns the light of Christ's

presence. Such cases occur all through the ages, for He is not to be

confined, bless His name! within the narrow limits of answering seeking

souls, or of showing Himself to people that are brought to Him by human

instrumentality; but far beyond these bounds He goes, and many a time

discloses His beauty and His sweetness to hearts that wist not of Him,

and who can only say, Lo! God was in this place, and I knew it not.'

Thou wast found of them that sought Thee not.'

As it was in His miracles upon earth, so it has been in the sweet and

gracious works of His grace ever since. Sometimes He healed in response

to the yearning desire that looked out of sick eyes, or that spoke from

parched lips, and no man that ever came to Him and said Heal me!' was

sent away beggared of His blessing. Sometimes He healed in response to

the beseeching of those who, with loving hearts, carried their dear

ones and laid them at His feet. But sometimes, to magnify the

spontaneity and the completeness of His own love, and to show us that

He is bound and limited by no human co-operation, and that He is His

own motive, He reached out the blessing to a hand that was not extended

to grasp it; and by His question, Wilt thou be made whole?' kindled

desires that else had lain dormant for ever.

And so in this story before us; He will welcome and over-answer Andrew

and John when they come seeking; He will turn round to them with a

smile on His face, that converts the question, What seek ye?' into an

invitation, Come and see.' And when Andrew brings his brother to Him,

He will go more than halfway to meet him. But when these are won, there

still remains another way by which He will have disciples brought into

His Kingdom, and that is by Himself going out and laying His hand on

the man and drawing him to His heart by the revelation of His love. But

further, and in a deeper sense, He really seeks us all, and, unasked,

bestows His love upon us.

Whether we seek Him or no, there is no heart upon earth which Christ

does not desire; and no man or woman within the sound of His gospel

whom He is not in a very real sense seeking that He may draw them to

Himself. His own word is a wonderful one: The Father seeketh such to

worship Him'; as if God went all up and down the world looking for

hearts to love Him and to turn to Him with reverent thankfulness. And

as the Father, so the Son--who is for us the revelation of the Father:

The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.' No one

on earth wanted Him, or dreamed of His coming. When He bowed the

heavens and gathered Himself into the narrow space of the manger in

Bethlehem, and took upon Him the limitations and the burdens and the

weaknesses of manhood, it was not in response to any petition, it was

in reply to no seeking; but He came spontaneously, unmoved, obeying but

the impulse of His own heart, and because He would have mercy. He who

is the Beginning, and will be First in all things, was first in this,

that before they called He answered, and came upon earth unbesought and

unexpected, because His own infinite love brought Him hither. Christ's

mercy to a world does not come like water in a well that has to be

pumped up, by our petitions, by our search, but like water in some

fountain, rising sparkling into the sunlight by its own inward impulse.

He is His own motive; and came to a forgetful and careless world, like

a shepherd who goes after his flock in the wilderness, not because they

bleat for him, while they crop the herbage which tempts them ever

further from the fold and remember him and it no more, but because he

cannot have them lost. Men are not conscious of needing Christ till He

comes. The supply creates the demand. He is like the dew which tarrieth

not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.'

But not only does Christ seek us all, inasmuch as the whole conception

and execution of His great work are independent of man's desires, but

He seeks us each in a thousand ways. He longs to have each of us for

His disciples. He seeks each of us for His disciples, by the motion of

His Spirit on our spirits, by stirring conviction in our consciences,

by pricking us often with a sense of our own evil, by all our

restlessness and dissatisfaction, by the disappointments and the

losses, as by the brightnesses and the goodness of earthly providences,

and often through such agencies as my lips and the lips of other men.

The Master Himself, who seeks all mankind, has sought and is seeking

you at this moment. Oh! yield to His search. The shepherd goes out on

the mountain side, for all the storm and the snow, and wades knee-deep

through the drifts until he finds the sheep. And your Shepherd, who is

also your Brother, has come looking for you, and at this moment is

putting out His hand and laying hold of some of you through my poor

words, and saying to you, as He said to Philip, Follow Me!'

II. And now let us next consider that word of authority which, spoken

to the one man in our text, is really spoken to us all.

Jesus findeth Philip, and saith unto him, "Follow Me!"' No doubt a

great deal more passed, but no doubt what more passed was less

significant and less important for the development of faith in this man

than what is recorded. The word of authority, the invitation which was

a demand, the demand which was an invitation, and the personal

impression which He produced upon Philip's heart, were the things that

bound him to Jesus Christ for ever. Follow Me,' spoken at the beginning

of the journey of Christ and His disciples back to Galilee, might have

meant merely, on the surface, Come back with us.' But the words have,

of course, a much deeper meaning. They mean--be My disciple. Think what

is implied in them, and ask yourself whether the demand that Christ

makes in these words is an unreasonable one, and then ask yourselves

whether you have yielded to it or not.

We lose the force of the image by much repetition. Sheep follow a

shepherd. Travellers follow a guide. Here is a man upon some dangerous

cornice of the Alps, with a ledge of limestone as broad as the palm of

your hand, and perhaps a couple of feet of snow above that, for him to

walk upon, a precipice on either side; and his guide says, as he ropes

himself to him, Now, tread where I tread!' Travellers follow their

guides. Soldiers follow their commanders. There is the hell of the

battlefield; here a line of wavering, timid, raw recruits. Their

commander rushes to the front and throws himself upon the advancing

enemy with the one word, Follow' and the coward becomes a hero.

Soldiers follow their captains. Your Shepherd comes to you and calls,

Follow Me.' Your Captain and Commander comes to you and calls, Follow

Me.' In all the dreary wilderness, in all the difficult contingencies

and conjunctions, in all the conflicts of life, this Man strides in

front of us and proposes Himself to us as Guide, Example, Consoler,

Friend, Companion, everything; and gathers up all duty, all

blessedness, in the majestic and simple words, Follow Me.'

It is a call at the least to accept Him as a Teacher, but the whole

gist of the context here is to show us that from the beginning Christ's

disciples did not look upon Him as a Rabbi's disciples did, as being

simply a teacher, but recognised Him as the Messias, the Son of God,

the King of Israel. So that they were called upon by this command to

accept His teaching in a very special way, not merely as Hillel or

Gamaliel asked their disciples to accept theirs. Do you do that? Do you

take Him as your illumination about all matters of theoretical truth,

and of practical wisdom? Is His declaration of God your theology? Is

His declaration of His own Person your creed? Do you think about His

Cross as He did when He elected to be remembered in all the world by

the broken body and the shed blood, which were the symbols of His

reconciling death? Is His teaching, that the Son of Man comes to give

His life a ransom for many,' the ground of your hope? Do you follow Him

in your belief, and following Him in your belief, do you accept Him as,

by His death and passion, the Saviour of your soul? That is the first

step--to follow Him, to trust Him wholly for what He is, the Incarnate

Son of God, the Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and

therefore for your sins and mine. This is a call to faith.

It is also a call to obedience. Follow Me' certainly means Do as I bid

you,' but softens all the harshness of that command. Sedulously plant

your tremulous feet in His firm footsteps. Where you see His track

going across the bog be not afraid to walk after Him, though it may

seem to lead you into the deepest and the blackest of it. Follow Him'

and you will be right. Follow Him' and you will be blessed. Do as

Christ did, or as according to the best of your judgment it seems to

you that Christ would have done if He had been in your circumstances;

and you will not go far wrong. The Imitation of Christ,' which Thomas a

Kempis wrote his book about, is the sum of all practical Christianity.

Follow Me!' makes discipleship to be something more than intellectual

acceptance of His teaching, something more than even reliance for my

salvation upon His work. It makes discipleship--springing out of these

two--the acceptance of His teaching and the consequent reliance, by

faith, upon His word--to be a practical reproduction of His character

and conduct in mine.

It is a call to communion. If a man follows Christ he will walk close

behind Him, and near enough to Him to hear Him speak, and to be guided

by His eye.' He will be separated from other people, and from other

paths. In these four things, then--Faith, Obedience, Imitation,

Communion--lies the essence of discipleship. No man is a Christian who

has not in some measure all four. Have you got them?

What right has Jesus Christ to ask me to follow Him? Why should I? Who

is He that He should set Himself up as being the perfect Example and

the Guide for all the world? What has He done to bind me to Him, that I

should take Him for my Master, and yield myself to Him in a subjection

that I refuse to the mightiest names in literature, and thought, and

practical benevolence? Who is this that assumes thus to dominate over

us all? Ah! brethren, there is only one answer. This is none other than

the Son of God who has given Himself a ransom for me, and therefore has

the right, and only therefore has the right, to say to me, "Follow

Me."'

III. And now one last word. Think for a moment about this silently and

swiftly obedient disciple.

Philip says nothing. Of course the narrative is mere sketchy outline.

He is silent, but he yields. Ah, brethren, how quickly a soul may be

won or lost! That moment, when Philip's decision was trembling in the

balance, was but a moment. It might have gone the other way, for Christ

has no pressed men in His army; they are all volunteers. It might have

gone the other way. A moment may settle for you whether you will be His

disciple or not. People tell us that the belief in instantaneous

conversions is unphilosophical. It seems to me that the objections to

them are unphilosophical. All decisions are matters of an instant.

Hesitation may be long, weighing and balancing may be a protracted

process, but the decision is always a moment's work, a knife-edge. And

there is no reason whatever why any one listening to me may not now, if

he or she will, do as this man Philip did on the spot, and when Christ

says Follow Me,' turn to Him and answer, I will follow Thee

whithersoever Thou goest.'

There is an old church tradition which says that the disciple who at a

subsequent period answered Christ, Lord! suffer me first to go and bury

my father,' was this same Apostle. I do not think that at all likely,

but the tradition suggests to us one last thought about the reasons why

people are kept back from yielding this obedience to Christ's

invitation. Many of you are kept back, as that procrastinating follower

was, because there are some other duties which you feel, or make to be,

more important. I will think about Christianity and turning religious

when this, that, or the other thing has been got over. I have my

position in life to make. I have a great many things to do that must be

done at once, and really, I have not time to think about it.'

Then there are some of you that are kept from following Christ because

you have never yet found out that you need a guide at all. Then there

are some of you that are kept back because you like very much better to

go your own way, and to follow your own inclination, and dislike the

idea of following the will of another. There are a host of other

reasons that I do not need to deal with now; but oh! brethren, none of

them is worth pleading. They are excuses, they are not reasons. They

all with one consent began to make excuse'--excuses, not reasons; and

manufactured excuses, in order to cover a decision which has been taken

before, and on other grounds altogether, which it is not convenient to

bring up to the surface. I am not going to deal with these in detail,

but I beseech you, do not let what I venture to call Christ's seeking

of you once more, even by my poor words now, be in vain.

Follow Him. Trust, obey, imitate, hold fellowship with Him. You will

always have a Companion, you will always have a Protector. He that

followeth Me,' saith He, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the

light of life.' And if you will listen to the Shepherd's voice and

follow Him, that sweet old promise will be true, in its divinest and

sweetest sense, about your life, in time; and about your life in the

moment of death, the isthmus between two worlds, and about your life in

eternity--They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the sun nor

heat smite them; for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even

by the springs of water shall He guide them.' Follow thou Me.'

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THE FIRST DISCIPLES: IV. NATHANAEL

Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found Him, of

whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth,

the son of Joseph. 46. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good

thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. 47.

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and saith of him, Behold an

Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! 48. Nathanael saith unto Him,

Whence knowest Thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that

Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. 49.

Nathanael answered and saith unto Him, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God;

Thou art the King of Israel.'--JOHN i. 45-49.

The words are often the least part of a conversation. The Evangelist

can tell us what Nathanael said to Jesus, and what Jesus said to

Nathanael, but no Evangelist can reproduce the look, the tone, the

magnetic influence which streamed out from Christ, and, we may believe,

more than anything He said, riveted these men to Him.

It looks as if Nathanael and his companions were very easily convinced,

as if their adhesion to such tremendous claims as those of Jesus Christ

was much too facile a thing to be a very deep one. But what can be put

down in black and white goes a very short way to solve the secret of

the power which drew them to Himself.

The incident which is before us now runs substantially on the same

lines as the previous bringing of Peter to Jesus Christ. In both cases

the man is brought by a friend, in both cases the friend's weapon is

simply the expression of his own personal experience, We have found the

Messias,' although Philip has a little more to say about Christ's

correspondence with the prophetic word. In both cases the work is

finished by our Lord Himself manifesting His own supernatural knowledge

to the inquiring spirit, though in the case of Nathanael that process

is a little more lengthened out than in the case of Peter, because

there was a little ice of hesitation and of doubt to be melted away.

And Nathanael, starting from a lower point than Peter, having questions

and hesitations which the other had not, rises to a higher point of

faith and certitude, and from his lips first of all comes the full

articulate confession, beyond which the Apostles never went as long as

our Lord was upon earth: Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the

King of Israel.' So that both in regard to the revelation that is given

of the character of our Lord, and in regard to the teaching that is

given of the development and process of faith in a soul, this last

narrative fitly crowns the whole series. In looking at it with you now,

I think I shall best bring out its force by asking you to take it as

falling into these three portions: first, the preparation--a soul

brought to Christ by a brother; then the conversation--a soul fastened

to Christ by Himself; and then the rapturous confession--Rabbi, Thou

art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel.'

I. Look, then, first of all, at the preparation--a soul brought to

Christ by a brother.

Philip findeth Nathanael.' Nathanael, in all probability, as

commentators will tell you, is the Apostle Bartholomew; and in the

catalogues of the Apostles in the Gospels, Philip and he are always

associated together. So that the two men, friends before, had their

friendship riveted and made more close by this sacredest of all bonds,

that the one had been to the other the means of bringing him to Jesus

Christ. There is nothing that ties men to each other like that. If you

want to know the full sweetness of association with friends, and of

human love, get some heart knit to yours by this sacred and eternal

bond that it owes to you its first knowledge of the Saviour. So all

human ties will be sweetened, ennobled, elevated, and made perpetual.

We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did

write: Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph.' Philip knows nothing

about Christ's supernatural birth, nor about its having been in

Bethlehem; to him He is the son of a Nazarene peasant. But,

notwithstanding that, He is the great, significant, mysterious Person

for whom the whole sacred literature of Israel had been one long

yearning for centuries; and he has come to believe that this Man

standing beside him is the Person on whom all previous divine

communications for a millennium past focussed and centred.

I need not dwell upon these words, because to do so would be to repeat

substantially what I said in a former sermon on these first disciples,

about the value of personal conviction as a means of producing

conviction in the minds of others, and about the necessity and the

possibility of all who have found Christ for themselves saying so to

others, and thereby becoming His missionaries and evangelists.

I do not need to repeat what I said on that occasion; therefore I pass

on to the very natural hesitation and question of Nathanael: Can there

any good thing come out of Nazareth?' A prejudice, no doubt, but a very

harmless one; a very thin ice which melted as soon as Christ's smile

beamed upon him. And a most natural prejudice. Nathanael came from Cana

of Galilee, a little hill village, three or four miles from Nazareth.

We all know the bitter feuds and jealousies of neighbouring villages,

and how nothing is so pleasant to the inhabitants of one as a gibe

about the inhabitants of another. And in Nathanael's words there simply

speaks the rustic jealousy of Cana against Nazareth.

It is easy to blame him, but do you think that you or I, if we had been

in his place, would have been likely to have said anything very

different? Suppose you were told that a peasant out of Ross-shire was a

man on whom the whole history of this nation hung. Do you think you

would be likely to believe it without first saying, That is a strange

place for such a person to be born in'? Galilee was the despised part

of Palestine, and Nazareth obviously was a proverbially despised

village of Galilee; and this Jesus was a carpenter's son that nobody

had ever heard of. It seemed to be a strange head on which the divine

dove should flutter down, passing by all the Pharisees and the Scribes,

all the great people and wise people. Nathanael's prejudice was but the

giving voice to a fault that is as wide as humanity, and which we have

every day of our lives to fight with; not only in regard to religious

matters but in regard to all others--namely, the habit of estimating

people, and their work, and their wisdom, and their power to teach us,

by the class to which they are supposed to belong, or even by the place

from which they come.

Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?' Can a German teach an

Englishman anything that he does not know?' Is a Protestant to owe

anything of spiritual illumination to a Roman Catholic?' Are we

Dissenters to receive any wisdom or example from Churchmen?' Will a

Conservative be able to give any lessons in politics to a Liberal?' Is

there any other bit of England that can teach Lancashire?' Take care

that whilst you are holding up your hands in horror against the

prejudices of our Lord's contemporaries, who stumbled at His origin,

you are not doing the same thing in regard to all manner of subjects

twenty times a day.

That is one very plain lesson, and not at all too secular for a sermon.

Take another. This three-parts innocent prejudice of Nathanael brings

into clear relief for us what a very real obstacle to the recognition

of our Lord's Messianic authority His apparent lowly origin was. We

have got over it, and it is no difficulty to us; but it was so then.

When Jesus Christ came into this world Judaea was ruled by the most

heartless of aristocracies, an aristocracy of cultured pedants.

Wherever you get such a class you get people who think that there can

be nobody worth looking at, or worth attending to, outside the little

limits of their own supercilious superiority. Why did Jesus Christ come

from the men of the earth,' as the Rabbis called all who had not

learned to cover every plain precept with spiders' webs of casuistry?

Why, for one thing, in accordance with the general law that the great

reformers and innovators always come from outside these classes, that

the Spirit of the Lord shall come on a herdsman like Amos, and

fishermen and peasants spread the Gospel through the world; and that in

politics, in literature, in science, as well as in religion, it is

always true that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty,

not many noble are called.' To the cultivated classes you have to look

for a great deal that is precious and good, but for fresh impulse, in

unbroken fields, you have to look outside them. And so the highest of

all lives is conformed to the general law.

More than that, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph,' came thus

because He was the poor man's Christ, because He was the ignorant man's

Christ, because His word was not for any class, but as broad as the

world. He came poor, obscure, unlettered, that all who, like Him, were

poor and untouched by the finger of earthly culture, might in Him find

their Brother, their Helper, and their Friend.

Philip saith unto him, Come and see.' He is not going to argue the

question. He gives the only possible answer to it--You ask Me, can any

good thing come out of Nazareth?' Come and see whether it is a good

thing or no; and if it is, and if it came out of Nazareth, well then,

the question has answered itself.' The quality of a thing cannot be

settled by the origin of the thing.

As it so happened, this Man did not come out of Nazareth at all, though

neither Philip nor Nathanael knew it; but if He had, it would have been

all the same. The right answer was Come and see.'

Now although, of course, there is no kind of correspondence between the

mere prejudice of this man Nathanael and the rooted intellectual doubts

of other generations, yet Come and see' carries in it the essence of

all Christian apologetics. By far the wisest thing that any man who has

to plead the cause of Christianity can do is to put Christ well

forward, and let people look at Him, and trust Him to produce His own

impression. We may argue round, and round, and round about Him for

evermore, and we shall never convince as surely as by simply holding

Him forth. I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.' Yet we are

so busy proving Christianity that we sometimes have no time to preach

it; so busy demonstrating that Jesus Christ is this, that, and the

other thing, or contradicting the notion that He is not this, that, and

the other thing, that we forget simply to present Him for men to look

at. Depend upon it, whilst argument has its function, and there are men

that must be approached thereby; on the whole, and for the general, the

best way of propagating Christianity is to proclaim it, and the second

best way is to prove it. Our arguments do fare very often very much as

did that elaborate discourse that a bishop once preached to prove the

existence of a God, at the end of which a simple old woman who had not

followed his reasoning very intelligently, exclaimed, Well, for all he

says, I can't help thinking there is a God after all.' The errors that

are quoted to be confuted often remain more clear in the hearers' minds

than the attempted confutations. Hold forth Christ--cry aloud to men,

Come and see!' and some eyes will turn and some hearts cleave to Him.

And on the other side, dear brethren, you have not done fairly by

Christianity until you have complied with this invitation, and

submitted your mind and heart honestly to the influence and the

impression that Christ Himself would make upon it.

II. We come now to the second stage--the conversation between Christ

and Nathanael, where we see a soul fastened to Christ by Himself.

In general terms, as I remarked, the method by which our Lord manifests

His Messiahship to this single soul is a revelation of His supernatural

knowledge of him. But a word or two may be said about the details. Mark

the emphasis with which the Evangelist shows us that our Lord speaks

this discriminating characterisation of Nathanael before Nathanael had

come to Him: He saw him coming.' So it was not with a swift,

penetrating glance of intuition that He read his character in his face.

It was not that He generalised rapidly from one action which He had

seen him do. It was not from any previous personal knowledge of him,

for, obviously, from the words of Philip to Nathanael, the latter had

never seen Jesus Christ. As Nathanael was drawing near Him, before he

had done anything to show himself, our Lord speaks the words which show

that He had read his very heart: Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is

no guile.'

That is to say, here is a man who truly represents that which was the

ideal of the whole nation. The reference is, no doubt, to the old story

of the occasion on which Jacob's name was changed to Israel. And we

shall see a further reference to the same story in the subsequent

verses. Jacob had wrestled with God in that mysterious scene by the

brook Jabbok, and had overcome, and had received instead of the name

Jacob, a supplanter,' the name of Israel, for as a Prince hast thou

power with God and hast prevailed.' And, says Christ: This man also is

a son of Israel, one of God's warriors, who has prevailed with Him by

prayer.' In whom is no guile'--Jacob in his early life had been marked

and marred by selfish craft. Subtlety and guile had been the very

keynote of his character. To drive that out of him, years of discipline

and pain and sorrow had been needed. And not until it had been driven

out of him could his name be altered, and he become Israel. This man

has had the guile driven out of him. By what process? The words are a

verbal quotation from Psalm xxxii.: Blessed is he whose transgression

is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the

Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.'

Clear, candid openness of spirit, and the freedom of soul from all that

corruption which the Psalmist calls guile,' is the property of him only

who has received it, by confession, by pardon, and by cleansing, from

God. Thus Nathanael, in his wrestling, had won the great gift. His

transgression had been forgiven; his iniquity had been covered; to him

God had not imputed his sin; and in his spirit, therefore, there was no

guile. Ah, brother! if that black drop is to be cleansed out of your

heart, it must be by the same means--confession to God and pardon from

God. And then you too will be a prince with Him. and your spirit will

be frank and free, and open and candid.

Nathanael, with astonishment, says, Lord, whence knowest Thou me?' Not

that he appropriates the description to himself, or recognises the

truthfulness of it, but he is surprised that Christ should have means

of forming any judgment with reference to him, and so he asks Him, half

expecting an answer which will show the natural origin of our Lord's

knowledge: Whence knowest Thou me?' Then comes the answer, which, to

supernatural insight into Nathanael's character, adds supernatural

knowledge of Nathanael's secret actions: Before that Philip called

thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. And it is because

I saw thee under the fig-tree that I knew thee to be "an Israelite

indeed, in whom there is no guile."' So then, under the fig-tree,

Nathanael must have been wrestling in prayer; under the fig-tree must

have been confessing his sins; under the fig-tree must have been

longing and looking for the Deliverer who was to turn away ungodliness

from Jacob.' So solitary had been that vigil, and so little would any

human eye that had looked upon it have known what had been passing in

his mind, that Christ's knowledge of it and of its significance at once

lights up in Nathanael's heart the fire of the glad conviction, Thou

art the Son of God.' If we had seen Nathanael, we should only have seen

a man sitting, sunk in thought, under a fig-tree; but Jesus had seen

the spiritual struggle which had no outward marks, and to have known

which He must have exercised the divine prerogative of reading the

heart.

I ask you to consider whether Nathanael's conclusion was not right, and

whether that woman of Samaria was not right when she hurried back to

the city, leaving her water-pot, and said, Come and see a man that told

me all that ever I did.' That all' was a little stretch of facts, but

still it was true in spirit. And her inference was absolutely true: Is

not this the Christ, the Son of God?' This is the first miracle that

Jesus Christ wrought. His supernatural knowledge, which cannot be

struck out from the New Testament representations of His character, is

as much a mark of divinity as any of the other of His earthly

manifestations. It is not the highest; it does not appeal to our

sympathies as some of the others do, but it is irrefragable. Here is a

man to whom all men with whom He came in contact were like those clocks

with a crystal face which shows us all the works. How does He come to

have this perfect and absolute knowledge?

That omniscience, as manifested here, shows us how glad Christ is when

He sees anything good, anything that He can praise in any of us. Behold

an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.' Not a word about

Nathanael's prejudice, not a word about any of his faults (though no

doubt he had plenty of them), but the cordial praise that he was an

honest, a sincere man, following after God and after truth. There is

nothing which so gladdens Christ as to see in us any faint traces of

longing for, and love towards, and likeness to, His own self. His

omniscience is never so pleased as when beneath heaps and mountains of

vanity and sin it discerns in a man's heart some poor germ of goodness

and longing for His grace.

And then again, notice how we have here our Lord's omniscience set

forth as cognisant of all our inward crises and struggles, When thou

wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.' I suppose all of us could look

back to some place or other, under some hawthorn hedge, or some boulder

by the seashore, or some mountain-top, or perhaps in some back-parlour,

or in some crowded street, where some never-to-be-forgotten epoch in

our soul's history passed, unseen by all eyes, and which would have

shown no trace to any onlooker, except perhaps a tightly compressed

lip. Let us rejoice to feel that Christ sees all these moments which no

other eye can see. In our hours of crisis, and in our monotonous,

uneventful moments, in the rush of the furious waters, when the stream

of our lives is caught among rocks, and in the long, languid reaches of

its smoothest flow, when we are fighting with our fears or yearning for

His light, or even when sitting dumb and stolid, like snow men,

apathetic and frozen in our indifference, He sees us, and pities, and

will help the need which He beholds.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,

And thy Saviour is not by;

Think not thou canst weep a tear,

And thy Saviour is not near.'

When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.'

III. One word more about this rapturous confession, which crowns the

whole: Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel.'

Where had Nathanael learned these great names? He was a disciple of

John the Baptist, and he had no doubt heard John's testimony as

recorded in this same chapter, when he told us how the voice from

Heaven had bid him recognise the Messiah by the token of the descending

Dove, and how he saw and bare record that this is the Son of God.'

John's testimony was echoed in Nathanael's confession. Undoubtedly he

attached but vague ideas to the name, far less articulate and doctrinal

than we have the privilege of doing. To him Son of God' could not have

meant all that it ought to mean to us, but it meant something that he

saw clearly, and a great deal beyond that he saw but dimly. It meant

that God had sent, and was in some special sense the Father of, this

Jesus of Nazareth.

Thou art the King of Israel,' John had been preaching, The Kingdom of

Heaven is at hand.' The Messiah was to be the theocratic King, the

King, not of Judah' nor of the Jews,' but of Israel,' the nation that

had entered into covenant with God. So the substance of the confession

was the Messiahship of Jesus, as resting upon His special divine

relationship and leading to His Kingly sway.

Notice also the enthusiasm of the confession; one's ear hears clearly a

tone of rapture in it. The joy-bells of the man's heart are all

a-ringing. It is no mere intellectual acknowledgment of Christ as

Messiah. The difference between mere head-belief and heart-faith lies

precisely in the presence of these elements of confidence, of

enthusiastic loyalty, and absolute submission.

So the great question for each of us is, not, Do I believe as a piece

of my intellectual creed that Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God,

the King of Israel'? I suppose almost all my hearers here now do that.

That will not make you a Christian, my friend. That will neither save

your soul nor quiet your heart, nor bring you peace and strength in

life, nor open the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven to you. A man may be

miserable, wholly sunk in all manner of wickedness and evil, die the

death of a dog, and go to punishment hereafter, though he believe that

Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the King of Israel. You want

something more than that. You want just this element of rapturous

acknowledgment, of loyal submission, absolute obedience, of unfaltering

trust.

Look at these first disciples, six brave men that had all that loyalty

and love to Him; though there was not a soul in the world but

themselves to share their convictions. Do they not shame you? When He

comes to you, as He does come, with this question, Whom do ye say that

I am?' may God give you grace to answer, Thou art the Christ, the Son

of the living God,' and not only to answer it with your lips, but to

trust Him wholly with your hearts, and with enthusiastic devotion to

bow your whole being in adoring wonder and glad submission at His feet.

If we are Israelites indeed,' our hearts will crown Him as the King of

Israel.'

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THE FIRST DISCIPLES: V. BELIEVING AND SEEING

Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee

under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than

these. 51. And He saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you,

Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and

descending upon the Son of Man.'--JOHN i. 50, 51.

Here we have the end of the narrative of the gathering together of the

first disciples, which has occupied several sermons. We have had

occasion to point out how each incident in the series has thrown some

fresh light upon two main subjects, namely, upon some phase or other of

the character and work of Jesus Christ, or upon the various ways by

which faith, which is the condition of discipleship, is kindled in

men's souls. These closing words may be taken as the crowning thoughts

on both these matters.

Our Lord recognises and accepts the faith of Nathanael and his fellows,

but, like a wise Teacher, lets His pupils at the very beginning get a

glimpse of how much lies ahead for them to learn; and in the act of

accepting the faith gives just one hint of the great tract of yet

uncomprehended knowledge of Him which lies before them; Because I said

unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt

see greater things than these.' He accepts Nathanael's confession and

the confession of his fellows. Human lips have given Him many great and

wonderful titles in this chapter. John called Him the Lamb of God'; the

first disciples hailed Him as the Messias, which is the Christ';

Nathanael fell before Him with the rapturous exclamation, Thou art the

Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel!' All these crowns had been put

on His head by human hands, but here He crowns Himself. He makes a

mightier claim than any that they had dreamed of, and proclaims Himself

to be the medium of all communication and intercourse between heaven

and earth: Hereafter ye shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God

ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

So, then, there are two great principles that lie in these verses, and

are contained in, first, our Lord's mighty promise to His new

disciples, and second, in our Lord's witness to Himself. Let me say a

word or two about each of these.

I. Our Lord's promise to His new disciples.

Christ's words here may be translated either as a question or as an

affirmation. It makes comparatively little difference to the

substantial meaning whether we read believest thou?' or thou

believest.' In the former case there will be a little more vivid

expression of surprise and admiration at the swiftness of Nathanael's

faith, but in neither case are we to find anything of the nature of

blame or of doubt as to the reality of his belief. The question, if it

be a question, is no question as to whether Nathanael's faith was a

genuine thing or not. There is no hint that he has been too quick with

his confession, and has climbed too rapidly to the point that he has

attained. But in either case, whether the word be a question or an

affirmation, we are to see in it the solemn and glad recognition of the

reality of Nathanael's confession and belief.

Here is the first time that that word belief' came from Christ's lips;

and when we remember all the importance that has been attached to it in

the subsequent history of the Church, and the revolution in human

thought which followed upon our Lord's demand of our faith, there is an

interest in noticing the first appearance of the word. It was an epoch

in the history of the world when Christ first claimed and accepted a

man's faith.

Of course the second part of this verse, Thou shalt see greater things

than these,' has its proper fulfilment in the gradual manifestation of

His person and character, which followed through the events recorded in

the Gospels. His life of service, His words of wisdom, His deeds of

power and of pity, His death of shame and of glory, His Resurrection

and His Ascension, these are the greater things' which Nathanael is

promised. They all lay unrevealed yet, and what our Lord means is

simply this: If you will continue to trust in Me, as you have trusted

Me, and stand beside Me, you will see unrolled before your eyes and

comprehended by your faith the great facts which will make the

manifestation of God to the world.' But though that be the original

application of the words, yet I think we may fairly draw from them some

lessons that are of importance to ourselves; and I ask you to look at

the hint that they give us about three things,--faith and discipleship,

faith and sight, faith and progress. Believest thou? thou shalt see

greater things than these.'

First, here is light thrown upon the relation between faith and

discipleship. It is clear that our Lord here uses the word for the

first time in the full Christian sense, that He regards the exercise of

faith as being practically synonymous with being a disciple, that from

the very first, believers were disciples, and disciples were believers.

Then, notice still further that our Lord here employs the word belief'

without any definition of what or whom it is that they were to believe.

He Himself, and not certain thoughts about Him, is the true object of a

man's faith. We may believe a proposition, but faith must grasp a

person. Even when the person is made known to us by a proposition which

we have to believe before we can trust the person, still the essence of

faith is not the intellectual process of laying hold upon a certain

thought, and acquiescing in it, but the moral process of casting myself

in full confidence upon the Being that is revealed to me by the

thought,--of laying my hand, and leaning my weight, on the Man about

whom it tells me. And so faith, which is discipleship, has in it for

its very essence the personal element of trust in Jesus Christ.

Then, further, notice how widely different from our creed was

Nathanael's creed, and yet how identical with our faith, if we are

Christians, was Nathanael's faith. He knew nothing about the very heart

of Christ's work, His atoning death. He knew nothing about the highest

glory of Christ's person, His divine Sonship, in its unique and lofty

sense. These lay unrevealed, and were amongst the greater things which

he was yet to see; but though thus his knowledge was imperfect, and his

creed incomplete as compared with ours, his faith was the very same. He

laid hold upon Christ, he clave to Him with all his heart, he was ready

to accept His teaching, he was willing to do His will, and as for the

rest--Thou shalt see greater things than these.' So, dear brethren,

from these words of my text here, from the unhesitating attribution of

the lofty notion of faith to this man, from the way in which our Lord

uses the word, are gathered these three points that I beseech you to

ponder: there is no discipleship without faith; faith is the personal

grasp of Christ Himself; the contents of creeds may differ whilst the

element of faith remains the same. I beseech you let Christ come to you

with the question of my text, and as He looks you in the eyes, hear Him

say to you, Believest thou?'

Secondly, notice how in this great promise to the new disciples there

is light thrown upon another subject, viz. the connection between faith

and sight. There is a great deal about seeing in this context. Christ

said to the first two that followed Him, Come and see.' Philip met

Nathanael's thin film of prejudice with the same words, Come and see.'

Christ greeted the approaching Nathanael with When thou wast under the

fig tree I saw thee.' And now His promise is cast into the same

metaphor: Thou shalt see greater things than these.'

There is a double antithesis here. I saw thee,' Thou shalt see Me.'

Thou wast convinced because thou didst feel that thou wert the passive

object of My vision. Thou shalt be still more convinced when

illuminated by Me. Thou shalt see even as thou art seen. I saw thee,

and that bound thee to Me; thou shalt see Me, and that will confirm the

bond.'

There is another antithesis, namely--between believing and seeing. Thou

believest--that is thy present; thou shalt see, that is thy hope for

the future.' Now I have already explained that, in the proper primary

meaning and application of the words, the sight which is here promised

is simply the observance with the outward eye of the historical facts

of our Lord's life which were yet to be learned. But still we may

gather a truth from this antithesis which will be of use to us. Thou

believest--thou shalt see'; that is to say, in the loftiest region of

spiritual experience you must believe first, in order that you may see.

I do not mean, as is sometimes meant, by that statement that a man has

to try to force his understanding into the attitude of accepting

religious truth, in order that he may have an experience which will

convince him that it is true. I mean a very much simpler thing than

that, and a very much truer one, viz. this, that unless we trust to

Christ and take our illumination from Him, we shall never behold a

whole set of truths which, when once we trust Him, are all plain and

clear to us. It is no mysticism to say that. What do you know about

God?--I put emphasis upon the word know'--What do you know about Him,

however much you may argue and speculate and think probable, and fear,

and hope, and question, about Him? What do you know about Him apart

from Jesus Christ? What do you know about human duty, apart from Him?

What do you know of all that dim region that lies beyond the grave,

apart from Him? If you trust Him, if you fall at His feet and say

Rabbi! Thou art my Teacher and mine illumination,' then you will see.

You will see God, man, yourselves, duty; you will see light upon a

thousand complications and perplexities; and you will have a brightness

above that of the noonday sun, streaming into the thickest darkness of

death and the grave and the awful hereafter. Christ is the Light. In

that Light shall we see light.' And just as it needs the sun to rise in

order that my eye may behold the outer world, so it needs that I shall

have Christ shining in my heaven to illuminate the whole universe, in

order that I may see clearly. Believe and thou shalt see.' For only

when we trust Him do the mightiest truths that affect humanity stand

plain and clear before us.

And besides that, if we trust Christ, we get a living experience of a

multitude of facts and principles which are all mist and darkness to

men except through their faith; an experience which is so vivid and

brings such certitude as that it may well be called vision. The world

says, Seeing is believing.' So it is about the coarse things that you

can handle, but about everything that is higher than these invert the

proverb, and you get the truth. Seeing is believing.' Yes, in regard to

outward things. Believing is seeing in regard to God and spiritual

truth. Believest thou? thou shalt see.'

Then, thirdly, there is light here about another matter, the connection

between faith and progress. Thou shalt see greater things than these.'

A wise teacher stimulates his scholars from the beginning, by giving

them glimpses of how much there is ahead to be learnt. That does not

drive them to despair; it braces all their powers. And so Christ, as

His first lesson to these men, substantially says, You have learnt

nothing yet, you are only beginning.' That is true about us all. Faith

at first, both in regard to its contents and its quality, is very

rudimentary and infantile. A man when he is first converted--perhaps

suddenly--knows after a fashion that he himself is a very sinful,

wretched, poor creature, and he knows that Jesus Christ has died for

him, and is his Saviour, and his heart goes out to Him, in confidence

and love and obedience. But he is only standing at the door and peeping

in as yet. He has only mastered the alphabet. He is but on the frontier

of the promised land. His faith has brought him into contact with

infinite power, and what will be the end of that? He will indefinitely

grow. His faith has started him on a course to which there is no

natural end. As long as it keeps alive he will be growing and growing,

and getting nearer and nearer to the great centre of all.

So here is a grand possibility opened out in these simple words, a

possibility which alone meets what you need, and what you are craving

for, whether you know it or not, namely, something that will give you

ever new powers and acquirements; something which will ensure your

closer and ever closer approach to an absolute object of joy and truth;

something that will ensure you against stagnation and guarantee

unceasing progress. Everything else gets worn out, sooner or later; if

not in this world, then in another. There is one course on which a man

can enter with the certainty that there is no end to it, that it will

open out, and out, and out as he advances--with the certainty that,

come life, come death, it is all the same.

When the plant grows too tall for the greenhouse they lift the roof,

and it grows higher still. Whether you have your growth in this lower

world, or whether you have your top up in the brightness and the blue

of heaven, the growth is in one direction. There is a way that secures

endless progress, and here lies the secret of it: Thou believest! thou

shalt see greater things than these.'

Now, brethren, that is a grand possibility, and it is a solemn lesson

for some of you. You professing Christian people, are you any taller

than you were when you were born? Have you grown at all? Are you

growing now? Have you seen any further into the depths of Jesus Christ

than you did on that first day when you fell at His feet and said, Thou

art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel'? His promise to you

then was, Thou believest, thou shalt see greater things.' If you have

not seen greater things it is because your faith has broken down, if it

has not expired.

II. Now let me turn to the second thought which lies in these great

words.

We have here, as I said, our Lord crowning Himself by His own witness

to His own dignity. Hereafter ye shall see the heavens opened.' Mark

how, with superbly autocratic lips, He bases this great utterance upon

nothing else but His own word. Prophets ever said, Thus saith the

Lord.' Christ ever said: Verily, verily, I say unto you.' Because He

could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself.' He puts His own

assurance instead of all argument and of all support to His words.

Hereafter.' A word which is possibly not genuine, and is omitted, as

you will observe, in the Revised Version. If it is to be retained it

must be translated, not hereafter,' as if it were pointing to some

indefinite period in the future, but from henceforth,' as if asserting

that the opening heavens and the descending angels began to be

manifested from that first hour of His official work. Ye shall see

heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending.' That is

an allusion from the story of Jacob at Bethel. We have found reference

to Jacob's history already in the conversation with Nathanael, An

Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.' And here is an unmistakable

reference to that story, when the fugitive, with his head on the stony

pillow, and the violet Syrian sky, with all its stars, rounding itself

above him, beheld the ladder on which the angels of God ascended and

descended. So,' says Christ, you shall see, in no vision of the night,

in no transitory appearance, but in a practical waking reality, that

ladder come down again, and the angels of God moving upon it in their

errands of mercy.'

And who, or what, is this ladder? Christ. Do not read these words as

meaning that the angels of God were to come down on Him to help, and to

honour, and to succour Him as they did once or twice in His life, but

as meaning that they are to ascend and descend by Him for the help and

blessing of the whole world.

That is to say, to put it into plain words, Christ is the sole medium

of communication between heaven and earth, the ladder with its foot

upon the earth in His humanity, and its top in the heavens. No man hath

ascended up into heaven save He which came down from heaven, even the

Son of Man which is in heaven.'

My time will not allow me to expand these thoughts as I would have

done; let me put them in the briefest outline. Christ is the medium of

all communication between heaven and earth, inasmuch as He is the

medium of all revelation. I have spoken incidentally about that in the

former part of this sermon, so I do not dwell on it now. Christ is the

ladder between heaven and earth, inasmuch as in Him the sense of

separation, and the reality of separation, are swept away. Sin has shut

heaven; there comes down from it many a blessing upon unthankful heads,

but between it in its purity and the earth in its muddy foulness there

is a great gulf fixed.' It is not because God is great and I am small,

or because He is Infinite and I am a mere pin-point as against a great

continent, it is not because He lives for ever, and my life is but a

hand-breadth, it is not because of the difference between His

Omniscience and my ignorance, His strength and my weakness, that I am

parted from Him. Your sins have separated between you and your God,'

and no man, build he Babels ever so high, can reach thither. There is

one means by which the separation is at an end, and by which all

objective hindrances to union, and all subjective hindrances, are alike

swept away. Christ has come, and in Him the heavens have bended down to

touch, and touching to bless, this low earth, and man and God are at

one once more.

He is the ladder, or sole medium of communication, inasmuch as by Him

all divine blessings, grace, helps, and favours, come down angel-like,

into our weak and needy hearts. Every strength, every mercy, every

spiritual power, consolation in every sorrow, fitness for duty,

illumination in darkness, all gifts that any of us can need, come to us

down on that one shining way, the mediation and the work of the

Divine-Human Christ, the Lord.

He is the ladder, the sole medium of communication between heaven and

earth, inasmuch as by Him my poor desires and prayers and

intercessions, my wishes, my sighs, my confessions rise to God. No man

cometh to the Father but by Me.' He is the ladder, the means of all

communication between heaven and earth, inasmuch as at the last, if

ever we enter there at all, we shall enter through Him and through Him

alone, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.'

Ah, dear brethren! men are telling us now that there is no connection

between earth and heaven except such as telescopes and spectroscopes

can make out. We are told that there is no ladder, that there are no

angels, that possibly there is no God, or if that there be, we have

nothing to do with Him nor He with us; that our prayers cannot get to

His ears, if He have ears, nor His hand be stretched out to help us, if

He have a hand. I do not know how this cultivated generation is to he

brought back again to faith in God and delivered from that ghastly

doubt which empties heaven and saddens earth to its victims, but by

giving heed to the word which Christ spoke to the whole race while He

addressed Nathanael, Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God

ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.' If He be the Son of God,

then all these heavenly messengers reach the earth by Him. If He be the

Son of Man, then every man may share in the gifts which through Him are

brought into the world, and His Manhood, which evermore dwelt in

heaven, even while on earth, and was ever girt about by angel

presences, is at once the measure of what each of us may become, and

the power by which we may become it.

One thing is needful for this wonderful consummation, even our faith.

And oh! how blessed it will be if in waste solitudes we can see the

open heaven, and in the blackest night the blaze of the glory of a

present Christ, and hear the soft rustle of angels' wings filling the

air, and find in every place a house of God and a gate of heaven,'

because He is there. All that may be yours on one condition: Believest

thou? Thou shalt see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and

descending upon the Son of Man.'

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JESUS THE JOY-BRINGER

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the

mother of Jesus was there: 2. And both Jesus was called, and His

disciples, to the marriage. 3. And when they wanted wine, the mother of

Jesus saith unto Him, They have no wine. 4. Jesus saith unto her,

Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come. 5. His

mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it. 6.

And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of

the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. 7.

Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled

them up to the brim. 8. And He saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear

unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. 9. When the ruler of

the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence

it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of

the feast called the bridegroom, 10. And saith unto him, Every man at

the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk,

then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now.

11. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and

manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him.'--JOHN

ii. 1-11.

The exact dating of this first miracle indicates an eye-witness. As

Nazareth was some thirty miles distant from the place where John was

baptizing, and Cana about four miles from Nazareth, the third day' is

probably reckoned from the day of the calling of Philip. Jesus and His

disciples seem to have been invited to the marriage feast later than

the other guests, as Mary was already there. She appears to have been

closely connected with the family celebrating the feast, as appears

from her knowledge of the deficiency in the wine, and her direction to

the servants.

The first point, which John makes all but as emphatic as the miracle

itself, is the new relation between Mary and Jesus, the lesson she had

to learn, and her sweet triumphant trust. Now that she sees her Son

surrounded by His disciples, the secret hope which she had nourished

silently for so long bursts into flame, and she turns to Him with

beautiful faith in His power to help, even in the small present need.

What an example her first word to Him sets us all! Like the two sad

sisters at Bethany, she is sure that to tell Him of trouble is enough,

for that His own heart will impel Him to share, and perchance to

relieve it. Let us tell Jesus our wants and leave Him to deal with them

as He knows how.

Of course, His addressing her as Woman' has not the meaning which it

would have with us, for the term is one of respect and courtesy, but

there is a plain intimation of a new distance in it, which is

strengthened by the question, What is there in common between us?' What

in common between a mother and her son! Yes, but she has to learn that

the assumption of the position of Messiah in which her mother's pride

so rejoiced, carried necessarily a consequence, the first of the swords

which were to pierce that mother's heart of hers. That her Son should

no more call her mother,' but woman,' told her that the old days of

being subject to her were past for ever, and that the old relation was

merged in the new one of Messiah and disciple--a bitter thought, which

many a parent has to taste the bitterness of still, when wider outlooks

and new sense of a vocation come to their children. Few mothers are

able to accept the inevitable as Mary did, Jesus' hour' is not to be

prescribed to Him, but His own consciousness of the fit time must

determine His action. What gave Him the signal that the hour was struck

is not told us, nor how soon after that moment it came. But the saying

gently but decisively declares His freedom, His infallible accuracy,

and certain intervention at the right time. We may think that He

delays, but He always helps, and that right early.'

Mary's sweet humility and strong trust come out wonderfully in her

direction to the servants, which is the exact opposite of what might

have been expected after the cold douche administered to her eagerness

to prompt Jesus. Her faith had laid hold of the little spark of promise

in that not yet,' and had fanned it into a flame. Then He will

intervene, and I can leave Him to settle when.' How firm, though

ignorant, must have been the faith which did not falter even at the

bitter lesson and the apparent repulse, and how it puts to shame our

feebler confidence in our better known Lord, if ever He delays our

requests! Mary left all to Jesus; His commands were to be implicitly

obeyed. Do we submit to Him in that absolute fashion both as to the

time and the manner of His responses to our petitions?

The next point is the actual miracle. It is told with remarkable

vividness and equally remarkable reserve. We do not even learn in what

precisely it consisted. Was all the water in the vessels turned into

wine? Did the change affect only what was drawn out? No answer is

possible to these questions. Jesus spoke no word of power, nor put

forth His hand. His will silently effected the change on matter. So He

manifested forth His glory as Creator and Sustainer, as wielding the

divine prerogative of affecting material things by His bare volition.

The reality of the miracle is certified by the jovial remark of the

ruler of the feast.' As Bengel says: The ignorance of the ruler proves

the goodness of the wine; the knowledge of the servants, the reality of

the miracle.' His palate, at any rate, was not so dulled as to be

unable to tell a good brand' when he tasted it, nor is there any reason

to suppose that Jesus was supplying more wine to a company that had

already had more than enough.

The ruler's words are not meant to apply to the guests at that feast,

but are quite general. But this Evangelist is fond of quoting words

which have deeper meanings than the speakers dreamed, and with his

mystically contemplative eye he sees hints and symbols of the spiritual

in very common things. So we are not forcing higher meanings into the

ruler's jest, but catching one intention of John's quotation of it,

when we see in it an unconscious utterance of the great truth that

Jesus keeps His best wine till the last. How many poor deluded souls

are ever finding that the world does the very opposite, luring men on

to be its slaves and victims by brilliant promises and shortlived

delights, which sooner or later lose their deceitful lustre and become

stale, and often positively bitter! The end of that mirth is

heaviness.' The dreariest thing in all the world is a godless old age,

and one of the most beautiful things in all the world is the calm

sunset which so often glorifies a godly life that has been full of

effort for Jesus, and of sorrows patiently borne as being sent by Him.

Full often clad in radiant vest

Deceitfully goes forth the morn,'

but Christ more than keeps His morning's promises, and Christian

experience is steadily progressive, if Christians cling close to Him,

and Heaven will supply the transcendent confirmation of the blessed

truth that was spoken unawares by the ruler' at that humble feast.

What effect the miracle produced on others is not told; probably the

guests shared the ruler's ignorance, but its effect on the disciples is

that they believed on Him.' They had believed' already, or they would

not have been disciples (John i. 50), but their faith was deepened as

well as called forth afresh. Our faith ought to be continuously and

increasingly responsive to His continuous manifestations of Himself

which we can all find in our own experience.

Jesus manifested His glory' in this first sign. What were the rays of

that mild radiance? Surely the chief of them, in addition to the

revelation of His sovereignty over matter, to which we have already

referred, is that therein He hallowed the sweet sacred joys of marriage

and family life, that therein He revealed Himself as looking with

sympathetic eye on the ties that bind us together, and on the gladness

of our common humanity, that therein He reveals Himself as able and

glad to sanctify and elevate our joys and infuse into them a strange

new fragrance and power. The water' of our ordinary lives is changed

into wine.' Jesus became acquainted with grief' in order that He might

impart to every believing and willing soul His own joy, and that by its

remaining in us, our joy might be full.

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THE FIRST MIRACLE IN CANA -- THE WATER MADE WINE

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested

forth His glory.'--JOHN ii. 11.

The keynote of this Gospel was struck in the earlier verses of the

first chapter in the great words, The Word was made flesh and dwelt

among us, and we beheld His glory, full of grace and truth.' To these

words there is an evident reference in this language. The Evangelist

regards Christ's first miracle as the first ray of that forth-flashing

glory of the Incarnate Word. To this Evangelist all miracles are

especially important as being signs, which is the word he generally

employs to designate them. They are not mere portents, but significant

revelations as well as wonders. It is not, I think, accidental that

there are just seven miracles of our Lord's, before His crucifixion,

recorded by John, and one of the Risen Lord.

These signs are all set forth by the Evangelist as manifestations of

various aspects of that one white light, of uncreated glory which rays

from Christ. They are, if I may so say, the sevenfold colours into

which the one beam is analysed. Each of them might be looked at in turn

as presenting some fresh thought of what the glory . . . full of grace

and truth' is.

I begin with the first of the series. What, then, is the glory of the

only Begotten Son' which flashes forth upon us from the miracle? My

object is simply to try to answer that question for you.

I. First, then, we see here the revelation of His creative power.

It is very noteworthy that the miraculous fact is veiled entirely in

the narrative. Not a word is said of the method of operation, it is not

even said that the miracle was wrought; we are only told what preceded

it, and what followed it. Itself is shrouded in deep silence. The

servants fill the water-pots.--Draw out now,' and they draw, and bear

it to the governor of the feast.' Where the miraculous act comes in we

do not know; what was its nature we cannot tell. How far it extended is

left obscure. Was all the large quantity of water in these six great

vessels of stone transformed into wine, or was the change effected in

the moment when the portion that was wanted was drawn from them and on

that portion only? We cannot answer the question. Probably, I think,

the latter; but at all events a veil is dropped over the fact.

Only this, we see that in this miracle, even more conspicuously than in

any other of our Lord's, there are no means at all employed. Sometimes

He used material vehicles, anointing a man's eyes with clay, or

moistening the ear with the spittle; sometimes sending a man to bathe

in the Pool of Siloam; sometimes laying His hand on the sick; sometimes

healing from a distance by the mere utterance of His word. But here

there is not even a word; no means of any kind employed, but the silent

forth-putting of His will, which, without token, without visible

audible indication of any sort, passes with sovereign power into the

midst of material things and there works according to His own purpose.

Is not this the signature of divinity, that without means the mere

forth-putting of the will is all that is wanted to mould matter as

plastic to His command? It is not even, He spake and it was done,' but

silently He willed, and the conscious water knew its Lord, and

blushed.' This is the glory of the Incarnate Word.

Now that was no interruption of the order of things established in the

Creation. There was no suspension of natural laws here. What happened

was only this, that the power which generally works through mediating

links came into immediate connection with the effect. What does it

matter whether your engine transmits its powers through half a dozen

cranks, or two or three less? What does it matter whether the chain be

longer or shorter? Some parenthetical links are dropped here, that is

all that is unusual. For in all ordinary natural operations, as we call

them, the profound prologue of this Gospel teaches us to believe that

Christ, the Eternal Word, works according to His will. He was the Agent

of creation. He is the Agent of that preservation which is only a

continual creation. In Him is life, and all living things live because

of the continual presence and operation upon them of His divine power.

And again I say, what is phenomenal and unusual in this miracle is but

the suppression of two or three of the connecting links between the

continual cause of all creatural existences, and its effect. So let us

learn that whether through a long chain of so-called causes, or whether

close up against the effect, without the intervention of these

parenthetical and transmitting media, the divine power works. The power

is one, and the reason for the effect is one, that Christ ever works in

the world, and is that Eternal Word, without whom was not anything made

that was made.' This beginning of miracles did Christ . . . and

manifested His glory.'

II. Then, again, we see here, I think, the revelation of one great

purpose of our Lord's coming, to hallow all common, and especially all

family, life.

What a strange contrast there is between the simple gladness of the

rustic village wedding and the tremendous scene of the Temptation in

the wilderness, which preceded it only by a few days! What a strange

contrast there is between the sublime heights of the first chapter and

the homely incident which opens the ministry! What a contrast between

the rigid asceticism of the Forerunner, who came neither eating nor

drinking,' and the Son of Man, who enters thus freely and cheerfully

into the common joys and relationships of human nature! How unlike the

scene at the marriage-feast must have been to the anticipations of the

half-dozen disciples that had gathered round Him, all a-tingling with

expectation as to what would be the first manifestation of His

Messianic power! The last thing they would have dreamed of would have

been to find Him in the humble home in Cana of Galilee. Some people say

this miracle is unworthy of Him, for it was wrought upon such a trivial

occasion.' And was it a trivial occasion that prompted Him thus to

commence His career, not by some high and strained and remote

exhibition of more than human saintliness or power, but by entering

like a Brother into the midst of common, homespun, earthly joys, and

showing how His presence ennobled and sanctified these? Surely the

world has gained from Him, among the many gifts that He has given to

it, few that have been the fountain of more sacred sweetness and

blessedness than is opened in that fact that the first manifestation of

His glory had for its result the hallowing of the marriage tie.

And is it not in accordance with the whole meaning and spirit of His

works that forasmuch as the brethren were partakers of' anything, He

Himself likewise should take part of the same,' and sanctify every

incident of life by His sharing of it? So He protests against that

faithless and wicked division of life into sacred and secular, which

has wrought such harm both in the sacred and in the secular regions. So

He protests against the notion that religion has to do with another

world rather than with this. So He protests against the narrowing

conception of His work which would remove from its influence anything

that interests humanity. So He says, as it were, at the very beginning

of His career, I am a Man, and nothing that is human do I reckon

foreign to Myself.'

Brethren! let us learn the lesson that all life is the region of His

Kingdom; that the sphere of His rule is everything which a man can do

or feel or think. Let us learn that where His footsteps have trod is

hallowed ground. If a prince shares for a few moments in the

festivities of his gathered people on some great occasion, how ennobled

the feast seems! If he joins in their sports or in their occupations

for a while as an act of condescension, how they return to them with

renewed vigour! And so we. We have had our King in the midst of all our

family life, in the midst of all our common duties; therefore are they

consecrated. Let us learn that all things done with the consciousness

of His presence are sacred. He has hallowed every corner of human life

by His presence; and the consecration, like some pungent and perennial

perfume, lingers for us yet in the else scentless air of daily life, if

we follow His footsteps.

Sanctity is not singularity. There is no need to withdraw from any

region of human activity and human interest in order to develop the

whitest saintliness, the most Christlike purity. The saint is to be in

the world, but not of it; like the Master, who went straight from the

wilderness and its temptations to the homely gladness of the rustic

marriage.

III. Still further, we have here a symbol of Christ's glory as the

ennobler and heightener of all earthly joys.

That may be taken with perhaps a permissible play of fancy as one

meaning, at any rate, of the transformation of water into wine; the

less savoury and fragrant and powerful liquid into the more so. Wine,

in the Old Testament especially, is the symbol of gladness, and though

it received a deeper and a sacreder meaning in the New Testament as

being the emblem of His blood shed for us, it is the Old Testament

point of view that prevails here. And therefore, I say, we may read in

the incident the symbol of His transforming power. He comes, the Man of

Sorrows, with the gift of joy in His hand. It is not an unworthy

object--not unworthy, I mean, of a divine sacrifice--to make men glad.

It is worth His while to come from Heaven to agonise and to die, in

order that He may sprinkle some drops of incorruptible and everlasting

joy over the weary and sorrowful hearts of earth. We do not always give

its true importance to gladness in the economy of our lives, because we

are so accustomed to draw our joys from ignoble sources that in most of

our joys there is something not altogether creditable or lofty. But

Christ came to bring gladness, and to transform its earthly sources

into heavenly fountains; and so to change all the less sweet,

satisfying, and potent draughts which we take from earth's cisterns

into the wine of the Kingdom; the new wine, strong and invigorating,

making glad the heart of man.'

Our commonest blessings, our commonest joys, if only they be not foul

and filthy, are capable of this transformation. Link them with Christ;

be glad in Him. Bring Him into your mirth, and it will change its

character. Like a taper plunged into a jar of oxygen, it will blaze up

more brightly. Earth, at its best and highest, without Him is like some

fair landscape lying in the shadow; and when He comes to it, it is like

the same scene when the sun blazes out upon it, flashes from every bend

of the rippling river, brings beauty into many a shady corner, opens

all the flowering petals and sets all the birds singing in the sky. The

whole scene changes when a beam of light from Him falls upon earthly

joys. He will transform them and ennoble them and make them perpetual.

Do not meddle with mirth over which you cannot make the sign of the

Cross and ask Him to bless it; and do not keep Him out of your

gladness, or it will leave bitterness on your lips, howsoever sweet it

tastes at first.

Ay! and not only can this Master transform the water at the marriage

feast into the wine of gladness, but the cups that we all carry, into

which our tears have dropped--upon these too He can lay His hand and

change them into cups of blessing and of salvation.

Blessed are they . . . who, passing through the valley of weeping,

gather their tears into a well; the rain also covereth it with

blessings.' So the old Psalm put the thought that sorrow may be turned

into a solemn joy, and may lie at the foundation of our most flowery

fruitfulness. And the same lesson we may learn from this symbol. The

Christ who transforms the water of earthly gladness into the wine of

heavenly blessedness, can do the same thing for the bitter waters of

sorrow, and can make them the occasions of solemn joy. When the leaves

drop we see through the bare branches. Shivering and cold they may

look, but we see the stars beyond, and that is better. This beginning

of miracles' will Jesus repeat in every sad heart that trusts itself to

Him.

IV. And last of all, we have here a token of His glory as supplying the

deficiencies of earthly sources.

His mother saith unto Him, "They have no wine."' The world's banquet

runs out, Christ supplies an infinite gift. These great water-pots that

stood there, if the whole contents of them were changed, as is

possible, contained far more than sufficient for the modest wants of

the little company. The water that flowed from each of them, in

obedience to the touch of the servant's hand, if the change were

effected then, as is possible, would flow on so long as any thirsted or

any asked. And Christ gives to each of us, if we choose, a fountain

that will spring unto life eternal. And when the world's platters are

empty, and the world's cups are all drained dry, He will feed and

satisfy the immortal hunger and the blessed thirst of every spirit that

longs for Him.

The rude speech of the governor of the feast may lend itself to another

aspect of this same thought. He said, in jesting surprise, Thou hast

kept the good wine until now,' whereas the world gives its best first,

and when the palate is dulled and the appetite diminished, then that

which is worse.' How true that is; how tragically true in some of our

lives! In the individual the early days of hope and vigour, when all

things were fresh and wondrous, when everything was apparelled in the

glory of a dream, contrast miserably with the bitter experiences of

life that most of us have made. Habit comes, and takes the edge off

everything. We drag remembrance, like a lengthening chain, through all

our life; and with remembrance come remorse and regret. The vision

splendid' no more attends men, as they plod on their way through the

weariness of middle life, or pass down into the deepening shadows of

advancing and solitary old age. The best comes first, for the men who

have no good but this world's. And some of you have got nothing in your

cups but dregs that you scarcely care to drink.

But Jesus Christ keeps the best till the last. His gifts become sweeter

every day. No time can cloy them. Advancing years make them more

precious and more necessary. The end is better in this course than the

beginning. And when life is over, and we pass into the heavens, the

word will come to our lips, with surprise and with thankfulness, as we

find how much better it all is than we had ever dreamed it should be:

Thou hast kept the good wine until now.'

Oh, my brother! do not touch that cup that is offered to you by the

harlot world, spiced and fragrant and foaming; at the last it biteth

like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.' But take the pure joys

which the Christ, loved, trusted, obeyed, summoned to your feast and

welcomed in your heart, will bring to you; and these shall grow and

greaten until the perfection of the Heavens.

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CHRIST CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

Take these things hence; make not My Father's house an house of

merchandise.'--JOHN ii. 16.

The other Evangelists do not record this cleansing of the Temple at the

beginning of Christ's ministry, but, as we all know, tell of a similar

act at its very close. John, on the other hand, has no notice of the

latter incident. The question, then, naturally arises, are these

diverse narratives accounts of the same event? The answer seems to me

to be in the negative, because John's Gospel is evidently intended to

supplement the other three, and to record incidents either unknown to,

or unnoticed by, them, and, as a matter of fact, the whole of this

initial visit of our Lord to Jerusalem is omitted by the three

Evangelists. Then the two incidents are distinctly different in tone,

in setting, and in the words with which our Lord accompanies them. They

are both appropriate in the place in which they stand, the one as the

initial and the other as all but the final act of His Messiahship. So

we may learn from the repetition of this cleansing the solemn lesson:

that outward reformation of religious corruptions is of small and

transient worth. For in three years--perhaps in as many weeks--the

abuse that He corrected returned in full force.

Now, this narrative has many points of interest, but I think I shall

best bring out its meaning if I remind you, by way of introduction,

that the Temple of Jerusalem was succeeded by the Temple of the

Christian Church, and that each individual Christian man is a temple.

So there are three things that I want to set before you: what Christ

did in the Temple; what He does in the Church; what He will do to each

of us if we will let Him.

I. First, then, what Christ did in the Temple.

Now, the scene in our narrative is not unlike that which may be

witnessed in any Roman Catholic country in the cathedral place or

outside the church on the saint's day, where there are long rows of

stalls, fitted up with rosaries, and images of the saint, and candles,

and other apparatus for worship.

The abuse had many practical grounds on which it could be defended. It

was very convenient to buy sacrifices on the spot, instead of having to

drag them from a distance. It was no less convenient to be able to

exchange foreign money, possibly bearing upon it the head of an

emperor, for the statutory half-shekel. It was profitable to the

sellers, and no doubt to the priests, who were probably sleeping

partners in the concern, or drew rent for the ground on which the

stalls stood. And so, being convenient for all and profitable to many,

the thing became a recognised institution.

Being familiar it became legitimate, and no one thought of any

incongruity in it until this young Nazarene felt a flash of zeal for

the sanctity of His Father's house consuming Him. Catching up some of

the reeds which served as bedding for the cattle, He twisted them into

the semblance of a scourge, which could hurt neither man nor beast. He

did not use it. It was a symbol, not an instrument. According to the

reading adopted in the Revised Version, it was the sheep and cattle,

not their owners, whom He drove out.' And then, dropping the scourge,

He turned to the money-changers, and, with the same hand, overthrew

their tables. And then came the turn of the sellers of doves. He would

not hurt the birds, nor rob their owners. And so He neither overthrew

nor opened the cages, but bade them Take these things hence'; and then

came the illuminating words, Make not My Father's house a house of

merchandise.'

Now this incident is very unlike our Lord's usual method, even if we do

not exaggerate the violence which He employed. It is unlike in two

respects: in the use of compulsion, and in aiming at mere outward

reformation. And both of these points are intimately connected with its

place in His career.

It was the first public appearance of Jesus before His nation as

Messiah. He inaugurates His work by a claim--by an act of authority--to

be the King of Israel and the Lord of the Temple. If we remember the

words from the last prophet, in which Malachi says that the Messenger

of the Covenant . . . shall suddenly come to His Temple, and purify the

sons of Levi,' we get the significance of this incident. We have to

mark in it our Lord's deliberate assumption of the role of Messiah; His

shaping His conduct so as to recall to all susceptible hearts that last

utterance of prophecy, and to recognise the fact that at the beginning

of His career He was fully conscious of His Son-ship, and inaugurated

His work by the solemn appeal to the nation to recognise Him as their

Lord.

And this is the reason, as I take it, why the anomalous incident is in

its place at the beginning of His career no less than the repetition of

it was at the close. And this is the explanation of the anomaly of the

incident. It is His solemn, authoritative claiming to be God's

Messenger, the Messiah long foretold.

Then, further, this incident is a singular manifestation of Christ's

unique power. How did it come that all these sordid hucksters had not a

word to say, and did not lift a finger in opposition, or that the

Temple Guard offered no resistance, and did not try to quell the

unseemly disturbance, or that the very officials, when they came to

reckon with Him, had nothing harsher to say than, What sign showest

Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things'? No miracle is

needed to explain that singular acquiescence. We see in lower forms

many instances of a similar thing. A man ablaze with holy indignation,

and having a secret ally in the hearts of those whom He rebukes, will

awe a crowd even if he does not infect them. But that is not the full

explanation. I see here an incident analogous to that strange event at

the close of Christ's ministry, when, coming out from beneath the

shadows of the olives in the garden, He said to the soldiers Whom seek

ye?' and they fell backwards and wallowed on the ground. An

overwhelming impression of His personal majesty, and perhaps some

forth-putting of that hidden glory which did swim up to the surface on

the mountain of Transfiguration, bowed all these men before Him, like

reeds before the wind. And though there was no recognition of His

claim, there was something in the Claimant that forbade resistance and

silenced remonstrance.

Further, this incident is a revelation of Christ's capacity for

righteous indignation. No two scenes can be more different than the two

recorded in this chapter: the one that took place in the rural

seclusion of Cana, nestling among the Galilean hills, the other that

was done in the courts of the Temple swarming with excited

festival-keepers; the one hallowing the common joys of daily life, the

other rebuking the profanation of what assumed to be a great deal more

sacred than a wedding festival; the one manifesting the love and

sympathy of Jesus, His power to ennoble all human relationships, and

His delight in ministering to need and bringing gladness, and the other

setting forth the sterner aspect of His character as consumed with holy

zeal for the sanctity of God's name and house. Taken together, one may

say that they cover the whole ground of His character, and in some very

real sense are a summary of all His work. The programme contains the

whole of what is to follow hereafter.

We may well take the lesson, which no generation ever needed more than

the present, both by reason of its excellences and of its defects, that

there were no love worthy of a perfect spirit in which there did not

lie dormant a dark capacity of wrath, and that Christ Himself would not

have been the Joy-bringer, the sympathising Gladdener which He

manifested Himself as being in the beginning of miracles in Cana of

Galilee' unless, side by side, there had lain in Him the power of holy

indignation and, if need be, of stern rebuke. Brethren, we must retain

our conception of His anger if we are not to maim our conception of His

love. There is no wrath like the wrath of the Lamb. The Temple court,

with the strange figure of the Christ with a scourge in His hand, is a

revelation which this generation, with its exaggerated sentimentalism,

with its shrinking, by reason of its good and of its evil, from the

very notion of a divine retribution based upon the eternal antagonism

between good and evil, most sorely needs.

II. Now, secondly, notice what Christ does in His Church.

I need not remind you how God's method of restoration is always to

restore with a difference and a progress. The ruined Temple on Zion was

not to be followed by another house of stone and lime, but by a

spiritual house,' builded together for a habitation of God in the

Spirit.' The Christian Church takes the place of that material

sanctuary, and is the dwelling-place of God.

That being so, let us take the lesson that that house, too, may be

desecrated. There may be, as there were in the original Temple, the

externals of worship, and yet, eating out the reality of these, there

may be an inward mercenary spirit.

Note how insensibly such corruption creeps in to a community. You

cannot embody an idea in a form or in an external association without

immediately dragging it down, and running the risk of degradation. It

is just like a drop of quicksilver which you cannot expose to the air

but instantaneously its brightness is dimmed by the scum that forms on

its surface. A church as an outward institution is exposed to all the

dangers to which other institutions are exposed. And these creep on

insensibly, as this abuse had crept on. So it is not enough that we

should be at ease in our consciences in regard to our practices as

Christian communities. We become familiar with any abuse, and as we

become familiar we lose the power of rightly judging of it. Therefore

conscience needs to be guided and enlightened quite as much as to be

obeyed.

How long has it taken the Christian Church to learn the wickedness of

slavery? Has the Christian Church yet learned the unchristianity of

War? Are there no abuses amongst us, which subsequent generations will

see to be so glaring that they will talk about us as we talk about our

ancestors, and wonder whether we were Christians at all when we could

tolerate such things? They creep on gradually, and they need continual

watchfulness if they are not to assume the mastery.

The special type of corruption which we find in this incident is one

that besets the Church always. Of course, if I were preaching to

ministers, I should have a great deal to say about that. For men that

are necessarily paid for preaching have a sore temptation to preach for

pay. But it is not only we professionals who have need to lay to heart

this incident. It is all Christian communities, established and

non-established churches, Roman Catholic and Protestant. The same

danger besets them all. There must be money to work the outward

business of the house of God. But what about people that run' churches

as they run mills? What about people whose test of the prosperity of a

Christian community is its balance-sheet? What about the people that

hang on to religious communities and services for the sake of what they

can make out of them? We have heard a great deal lately about what

would happen if Christ came to Chicago.' If Christ came to any

community of professing Christians in this land, do you not think He

would need to have the scourge in His hand, and to say Make not My

Father's house a house of merchandise'? He will come; He does come; He

is always coming if we would listen to Him. And at long intervals He

comes in some tremendous and manifest fashion, and overthrows the

money-changers' tables.

Ah, brethren! if Jesus Christ had not thus come, over and over again,

to His Church, Christian men would have killed Christianity long ago.

Did you ever think that Christianity is the only religion that has

shown recuperative power and that has been able to fling off its

peccant humours? They used to say--I do not know whether it is true or

not--that Thames water was good to put on board ship because of its

property of corrupting and then clearing itself, and becoming fit to

drink. We and our brethren, all through the ages, have been corrupting

the Water of Life. And how does it come to be sweet and powerful still?

This tree has substance in it when it casts its leaves. That unique

characteristic of Christianity, its power of reformation, is not

self-reformation, but it is a coming of the Lord to His temple to

purify the sons of Levi, that their offering may be pleasant as in days

of yore.'

So one looks upon the spectacle of churches labouring under all manner

of corruptions; and one need not lose heart. The shortest day is the

day before the year turns; and when the need is sorest the help is

nearest. And so I, for my part, believe that very much of the

organisations of all existing churches will have to be swept away. But

I believe too, with all my heart--and I hope that you do--that, though

the precious wheat is riddled in the sieve, and the chaff falls to the

ground, not one grain will go through the meshes. Whatever becomes of

churches, the Church of Christ shall never have its strength so sapped

by abuses that it must perish, or its lustre so dimmed that the Lord of

the Temple must depart from His sanctuary.

III. Lastly, note what Christ will do for each of us if we will let

Him.

It is not a community only which is the temple of God. For the Apostles

in many places suggest, and in some distinctly say, ye are the temples'

individually, as well as the Temple collectively, of the Most High. And

so every Christian soul--by virtue of that which is the deepest truth

of Christianity, the indwelling of Christ in men's hearts by faith--is

a temple of God; and every human soul is meant to be and may become

such. That temple can be profaned. There are many ways in which

professing Christians make it a house of merchandise. There are forms

of religion which are little better than chaffering with God, to give

Him so much service if He will repay us with so much Heaven. There are

too many temptations, to which we yield, to bring secular thoughts into

our holiest things. Some of us, by reason not of wishing wealth but of

dreading penury, find it hard to shut worldly cares out of our hearts.

We all need to be on our guard lest the atmosphere in which we live in

this great city shall penetrate even into our moments of devotion, and

the noise of the market within earshot of the Holy of Holies shall

disturb the chant of the worshippers. It is Manchester's temptation,

and it is one that most of us need to be guarded against.

So engrossed, and, as we should say, necessarily engrossed--or, at all

events, legitimately engrossed--are we in the pursuits of our daily

commerce, that we have scarcely time enough or leisure of heart and

mind enough to come into the secret place of the Most High.' The

worshippers stop outside trading for beasts and doves, and they have no

time to go into the Temple and present their offerings.

It is our besetting danger. Forewarned is forearmed, to some extent.

Would that we could all hear, as we go about our ordinary avocations,

that solemn voice, Make not My Father's house a house of merchandise,'

and could keep the inner sanctuary still from the noises, and remote

from the pollutions, of the market hard by!

We cannot cast out these or any other desecrating thoughts and desires

by ourselves, except to a very small degree. And if we do, then there

happens what our Lord warned us against in profound words. The house

may be emptied of the evil tenant in some measure by our own resolution

and self-reformation. But if it is not occupied by Him, it remains

empty,' though it is swept and garnished.' Nature abhors a vacuum, and

into the empty house there come the old tenant and seven brethren

blacker than himself. The only way to keep the world out of my heart is

to have Christ filling it. If we will ask Him He will come to us. And

if He has the scourge in His hand, let Him be none the less welcome a

guest for that. He will come, and when He enters, it will be like the

rising of the sun, when all the beasts of the forest slink away and lay

them down in their dens. It will be like the carrying of the Ark of the

Covenant of the Lord of the whole earth into the temple of Dagon, when

the fish-like image fell prone and mutilated on the threshold. If we

say to Him, Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest, Thou and the Ark of Thy

strength,' He will enter in, and by His entrance will make the place of

His feet glorious' and pure.

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THE DESTROYERS AND THE RESTORER

Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this Temple, and in three

days I will raise it up.'--JOHN ii. 19.

This is our Lord's answer to the Jewish request for a sign which should

warrant His action in cleansing the Temple. There are two such

cleansings recorded in the Gospels; this one His first public act, and

another, omitted by John, but recorded in the other Gospels, which was

almost His last public act.

It has been suggested that these are but two versions of one incident;

and although there is no objection in principle to admitting the

possibility of that explanation, yet in fact it appears to me

insufficient and unnecessary. For each event is appropriate in its own

place. In each there is a distinct difference in tone. The incident

recorded in the present chapter has our Lord's commentary, Make not My

Father's house a house of merchandise'; in that recorded in the

Synoptic Gospels the profanation is declared as greater, and the rebuke

is more severe. The house of merchandise' has become, by their refusal

to render to Him what was His, a den of thieves.' In the later incident

there is a reference in our Lord's quotation from the Old Testament to

the entrance of the Gentiles into the Kingdom. There is no such

reference here. In the other Gospels there is no record of this

question which the Jews asked, nor of our Lord's significant answer,

whilst yet a caricatured and mistaken version of that answer was known

to the other Evangelists, and is put by them into the mouths of the

false witnesses at our Lord's trial. They thus attest the accuracy of

our narrative even while they seem not to have known of the incident.

All these things being taken into account, I think that we have to do

with a double, of which there are several instances in the Gospels, the

same event recurring under somewhat varied circumstances, and

reflecting varied aspects of truth. But it is to our Lord's words in

vindication of His right to cleanse the Temple rather than to the

incident on which they are based that I wish to turn your attention

now: Destroy this Temple,' said our Lord, as His sufficient and only

answer to the demand for a sign, and in three days I will raise it up.'

Now these words, enigmatical as they are, seem to me to be very

profound and significant; and I wish, on this Easter Sunday, to look at

them as throwing a light upon the gladness of this day. They suggest to

me three things: I find in them, first, an enigmatical forecast of our

Lord's own history; second, a prophetic warning of Israel's; and last,

a symbolical foreshadowing of His world-wide work as the Restorer of

man's destructions. Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise

it up.'

I. First then, I think, we see here an enigmatical forecast of our

Lord's own history.

Notice, first, that marvellous and unique consciousness of our Lord's

as to His own dignity and nature. He spake of the temple of His body.'

Think that here is a man, apparently one of ourselves, walking amongst

us, living the common life of humanity, who declares that in Him, in an

altogether solitary and peculiar fashion, there abides the fulness of

Deity. Think that there has been a Man who said, In this place is One

greater than the Temple.' And people have believed Him, and do believe

Him, and have found that the tremendous audacity of the words is simple

verity, and that Christ is, in inmost reality, all which the Temple was

but in the poorest symbol. In it there had dwelt, though there dwelt no

longer at the time when He was speaking, a material and symbolical

brightness, the expression of something which, for want of a better

name, we call the presence of God.' But what was that flashing fire

between the cherubim that brooded over the Mercy-seat, with a light

that was lambent and lustrous as the light of love and of life--what

was that to the glory, moulded in meekness and garbed in gentleness,

the glory that shone, merciful and hospitable and inviting--a tempered

flame on which the poorest, diseased, blind eyes could look, and not

wince--from the face and from the character of Jesus Christ the Lord?

He is greater than the Temple, for in Him, in no symbol but in reality,

abode and abides the fulness of that unnameable Being whom we name

Father and God. And not only does the fulness abide, but in Him that

awful Remoteness becomes for us a merciful Presence; the infinite abyss

and closed sea of the divine nature hath an outlet, and becomes a river

of water of life.' And as the ancient name of that Temple was the Tent

of Meeting,' the place where Israel and God, in symbolical and

ceremonial form, met together, so, in inmost reality in Christ's

nature, Manhood and Divinity cohere and unite, and in Him all of us,

the weak, the sinful, the alien, the rebellious, may meet our Father.

He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' In this place is One

greater than the Temple.'

And so this Jewish Peasant, at the very beginning of His earthly

career, stands up there, in the presence of the ancestral sanctities

and immemorial ceremonials which had been consecrated by all these ages

and commanded by God Himself, and with autocratic hand sweeps them all

on one side, as one that should draw a curtain that the statue might be

seen, and remains poised Himself in the vacant place, that all eyes may

look upon Him, and on Him alone. Destroy this Temple . . . . He spake

of the temple of His body.'

Still further, notice how here we have, at the very beginning of our

Lord's career, His distinct prevision of how it was all going to end.

People that are willing to honour Jesus Christ, and are not willing to

recognise His death as the great purpose for which He came, tell us

that, like as with other reformers and heroes and martyrs, His death

was the result of the failure of His purpose. And some of them talk to

us very glibly, in their so-called Lives of Jesus Christ' about the

alteration in Christ's plan which came when He saw that His message was

not going to be received. I do not enter upon all the reasons why such

a construction of Christ's work cannot hold water, but here is one--for

any one who believes this story before us--that at the very beginning,

before He had gone half a dozen steps in His public career, when the

issues of the experiment, if it was a man that was making the

experiment, were all untried; when, if it were merely a

martyr-enthusiast that was beginning his struggle, some flickering

light of hope that He would be received of His brethren must have

shone, or He would never have ventured upon the path--that then, with

no mistake, with no illusion, with no expectation of a welcome and a

Hosanna, but with the clearest certitude of what lay before Him, our

Lord beheld and accepted His Cross. Its shadow fell upon His path from

the beginning, because the Cross was the purpose for which He came. To

this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world,' said

He--when the reality of it was almost within arm's length of Him--to

bear witness to the Truth,' and His bearing witness to the truth was

perfected and accomplished on the Cross. Here, at the very commencement

of His career, we have it distinctly set forth, the Son of Man came to

give His life a ransom for many.'

And, brethren, that fact is important, not only because it helps us to

understand that His death is the centre of His work, but also because

it helps us to a loving and tender thought of Him, how all His life

long, with that issue distinctly before Him, He journeyed towards it of

His own loving will; how every step that He took on earth's flinty

roads, taken with bleeding and pure feet, He took knowing whither He

was going. This Isaac climbs the mountain to the place of sacrifice,

with no illusions as to what He is going up the mountain for. He knows

that He goes up to be the lamb of the offering, and knowing it, He

goes. Therefore let us love Him with love as persistent as was His own,

who discerning the end from the beginning, willed to be born and to

live because He had resolved to die, for you and me and every man.

And then, further, we have here our Lord's claim to be Himself the

Agent of His own resurrection. I will raise it up in three days.' Of

course, in Scripture, we more frequently find the Resurrection treated

as being the result of the power of God the Father. We more ordinarily

read that Christ was raised; but sometimes we read, as here, that

Christ rises, and we have solemn words of His own, I have power to lay

it down, and I have power to take it again.' Think of a man saying, I

am going to bring My own body from the dust of death,' and think of the

man who said that doing it. If that is true, if this prediction was

uttered, and being uttered was fulfilled--what then? I do not need to

answer the question. My brother, this day declares that Jesus Christ is

the Son of God. Destroy this Temple'--there is a challenge--and in

three days I will raise it up'; and He did it. And He is the Lord of

the Temple as well as the Temple. Down on your knees before Him, with

all your hearts and with all your confidence, and worship, and trust,

and love for evermore the Second Man,' who is the Lord from Heaven!'

II. Now let us turn to the other aspects of these words. I think we see

here, in the next place, a prophetic warning of the history of the men

to whom He was speaking.

There must be a connection between the interpretation of the words

which our Evangelist assures us is the correct one, and the

interpretation which would naturally have occurred to a listener, that

by this Temple' our Lord really meant simply the literal building in

which He spoke. There is such a connection, and though our Lord did not

only mean the Temple, He did mean the Temple. To say so is not forcing

double meanings in any fast and loose fashion upon Scripture, nor

playing with ambiguities, nor indulging in any of the vices to which

spiritualising interpretation of Scripture leads, but it is simply

grasping the central idea of the words of my text. Rightly understood

they lead us to this: The death of Christ was the destruction of the

Jewish Temple and polity, and the raising again of Christ from the dead

on the third day was the raising again of that destroyed Theocracy and

Temple in a new and nobler fashion.' Let us then look for a moment, and

it shall only be for a moment, at these two thoughts.

If any one had said to any of that howling mob that stood round Christ

at the judgment-seat of the High Priest, and fancied themselves

condemning Him to death, because He had blasphemed the Temple: You, at

this moment, are pulling down the holy and beautiful house in which

your fathers praised; and what you are doing now is the destruction of

your national worship and of yourselves,' the words would have been

received with incredulity; and yet they were simple truth. Christ's

death destroyed that outward Temple. The veil was rent in twain from

the top to the bottom' at the moment He died; which was the declaration

indeed that henceforward the Holiest of All was patent to the foot of

every man, but was also the declaration that there was no more sanctity

now within those courts, and that Temple, and priesthood, and

sacrifice, and altar, and ceremonial and all, were antiquated. That

which was perfect having come,' Christ's death having realised all

which Temple-worship symbolised, that which was the shadow was put away

when the substance appeared.

And in another fashion, it is also true that the death of our Lord

Jesus Christ, inflicted by Jewish hands, was the destruction of the

Jewish worship, in the way of natural sequence and of divine

chastisement. When the husbandmen rejected the Son who was sent last of

all,' there was nothing more for it but that they should be cast out of

the vineyard,' and the firebrand which the Roman soldier, forty years

afterwards, tossed into the Holiest of All, and which burned the holy

and beautiful house with fire, was lit on the day when Israel cried

Crucify Him! Crucify Him!'

Oh, brethren! What a lesson it is to us all of how blind even so-called

religious zeal may be; how often it is true that men in their madness

and their ignorance destroy the very institutions which they are trying

to conserve! How it warns us to beware lest we, unknowing what we are

about, and thinking that we are fighting for the honour of God, may

really all the while be but serving ourselves and rejecting His message

and His Messenger!

And then let me remind you that another thing is also true, that just

as the Jewish rejection of Christ was their own rejection as the people

of God, and their attempted destruction of Christ the destruction of

the Jewish Temple, so the other side of the truth is also here, viz.

that His rising again is the restoration of the destroyed Temple in

nobler and fairer form. Of course the one real Temple is the body of

Jesus Christ, as we have said, where sacrifice is offered, where God

dwells, where men meet with God. But in a secondary and derivative

sense, in the place of the Jewish Temple has come the Christian Church,

which is, in a far deeper and more inward fashion, what that ancient

system aspired to be.

Christ has builded up the Church on His Resurrection. On His

Resurrection, I say, for there is nothing else on which it could rest.

If men ask me what is the great evidence of Christ's Resurrection, my

answer is--the existence in the world of a Church. Where did it come

from? How is it possible to conceive that without the Resurrection of

Jesus Christ such a structure as the Christian society should have been

built upon a dead man's grave? It would have gone to pieces, as all

similar associations would have gone. What had happened after that

moment of depression which scattered them every man to his own, and led

some of them to say, with pathetic use of the past tense to describe

their vanished expectations, We trusted that it had been He which

should have redeemed Israel'? What was the force that instead of

driving them asunder drew them together? What was the power that,

instead of quenching their almost dead hopes, caused them to flame up

with renewed vigour heaven-high? How came it that that band of

cowardly, dispirited Jewish peasants, who scattered in selfish fear and

heart-sick disappointment, were in a few days found bearding all

antagonism, and convinced that their hopes had only erred by being too

faint and dim? The only answer is in their own message, which explained

it all: Him hath God raised from the dead, whereof we are all

witnesses.'

The destroyed Temple disappears, and out of the dust and smoke of the

vanishing ruins there rises, beautiful and serene, though incomplete

and fragmentary and defaced with many a stain, the fairer reality, the

Church of the living Christ. Destroy this Temple, and in three days I

will raise it up.'

III. Lastly, we have here a foreshadowing of our Lord's world-wide work

as the Restorer of man's destructions.

Man's folly, godlessness, worldliness, lust, sin, are ever working to

the destruction of all that is sacred in humanity and in life, and to

the desecrating of every shrine. We ourselves, in regard to our own

hearts, which are made to be the temples of the living God,' are ever,

by our sins, shortcomings, and selfishness, bringing pollution into the

holiest of all; breaking down the carved work thereof with axes and

hammers,' and setting up the abomination of desolation in the holy

places of our hearts. We pollute them all--conscience, imagination,

memory, will, intellect. How many a man listening to me now has his

nature like the facade of some of our cathedrals, with the empty niches

and broken statues proclaiming that wanton desecration and destruction

have been busy there?

My brother! what have you done with your heart? Destroy this temple.'

Christ spoke to men who did not know what they were doing; and He

speaks to you. It is the inmost meaning of the life of many of you.

Hour by hour, day by day, action by action, you are devastating and

profaning the sanctities of your nature, and the sacred places there

where God ought to live.

Listen to His confident promise. He knows that in me He is able to

restore to more than pristine beauty all which I, by my sin, have

destroyed; to reconsecrate all which I, by my profanity, have polluted;

to cast out the evil deities that desecrate and deform the shrine; and

to make my poor heart, if only I will let Him come in to the ruined

chamber, a fairer temple and dwelling-place of God.

In three days,' does He do it? In one sense--Yes! Thank God! the power

that hallows and restores the desecrated and cast-down temple in a

man's heart, was lodged in the world in those three days of death and

resurrection. The fact that He died for our sins,' the fact that He was

raised again for our justification,' are the plastic and architectonic

powers which will build up any character into a temple of God.

And yet more than forty and six years' will that temple have to be in

building.' It is a lifelong task till the top-stone be brought forth.

Only let us remember this: Christ, who is Architect and Builder,

Foundation and Top-stone; ay! and Deity indwelling in the temple, and

building it by His indwelling--this Christ is not one of those who

begin to build and are not able to finish.' He realises all His plans.

There are no ruined edifices in the City'; nor any half-finished fanes

of worship within the walls of that great Jerusalem whose builder and

maker is Christ.

If you will put yourselves in His hands, and trust yourselves to Him,

He will take away all your incompleteness, and will make you body,

soul, and spirit, temples of the Lord God; as far above the loftiest

beauty and whitest sanctity of any Christian character here on earth as

is the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the

heavens,' above the earthly house of this tabernacle.'

He will perfect this restoring work at the last, when His Word to His

servant Death, as He points him to us, shall be Destroy this temple,

and I will raise it up.'

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TEACHER OR SAVIOUR?

The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that

Thou art a Teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that

Thou doest, except God be with him.'--JOHN iii. 2.

The connection in which the Evangelist introduces the story of

Nicodemus throws great light on the aspect under which we are to regard

it. He has just been saying that upon our Lord's first visit to

Jerusalem at the Passover there was a considerable amount of interest

excited, and a kind of imperfect faith in Him drawn out, based solely

on His miracles. He adds that this faith was regarded by Christ as

unreliable; and he goes on to explain that our Lord exercised great

reserve in His dealings with the persons who professed it, for the

reason that He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of

man, for He knew what was in man.'

Now, if you note that reiteration of the word man,' you will understand

the description which is given of the person who is next introduced. He

knew what was in man. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus,

a ruler of the Jews.' It would have been enough to have said, There was

a Pharisee.' When John says a man of the Pharisees,' he is not merely

carried away by the echo in his ears of his own last words, but it is

as if he had said, Now, here is one illustration of the sort of thing

that I have been speaking about; one specimen of an imperfect faith

built upon miracles; and one illustration of the way in which Jesus

Christ dealt with it.'

Nicodemus was a Pharisee.' That tells us the school to which he

belonged, and the general drift of his thought. He was a ruler of the

Jews.' That tells us that he held an official position in the supreme

court of the nation, to which the Romans had left some considerable

shadow of power in ecclesiastical matters. And this man comes to Christ

and acknowledges Him. Christ deals with him in a very suggestive

fashion. His confession, and the way in which our Lord received it, are

what I desire to consider briefly in this sermon.

I. Note then, first, this imperfect confession.

Everything about it, pretty nearly, is wrong. He came to Jesus by

night,' half-ashamed and wholly afraid of speaking out the conviction

that was working in him. He was a man in position. He could not

compromise himself in the eyes of his co-Sanhedrists. It would be a

grave thing for a man like me to be found in converse with this new

Rabbi and apparent Prophet. I must go cautiously, and have regard to my

reputation and my standing in the world; and shall steal to Him by

night.' There is something wrong with any convictions about Jesus

Christ which let themselves be huddled up in secret. The true

apprehension of Him is like a fire in a man's bones, that makes him

weary of forbearing' when he locks his lips, and forces him to speak.

If Christians can be dumb, there is something dreadfully wrong with

their Christianity. If they do not regard Jesus Christ in such an

aspect as to oblige them to stand out in the world and say, Whatever

anybody says or thinks about it, I am Christ's man,' then be sure that

they do not yet know Him as they ought to do.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night,' and therein condemned himself. He

said, Rabbi, we know.' There is more than a soupcon of patronage in

that. He is giving Jesus Christ a certificate, duly signed and sealed

by Rabbinical authority. He evidently thinks that it is no small matter

that he and some of his fellows should have been disposed to look with

favour upon this new Teacher. And so he comes, if not patronising the

young man, at all events extremely conscious of his own condescension

in recognising Him with his We know.'

Had he the right to speak for any of his colleagues? If so, then at

that very early stage of our Lord's ministry there was a conviction

beginning to work in that body of ecclesiastics which casts a very

lurid light on their subsequent proceedings. It was a good long while

after, when Jesus Christ's attitude towards them had been a little more

clearly made out than it was at the beginning, that they said

officially, As for this fellow, we know not whence He is.' They knew'

when He did not seem to be trenching on their prerogatives, or driving

His Ithuriel-spear through their traditional professions of orthodoxy

and punctilious casuistries. But when He trod on their toes, when He

ripped up their pretensions, when He began to show His antagonism to

their formalism and traditionalism, then they did not know where He

came from. And there are many of us who are very polite to Jesus Christ

as long as He does not interfere with us, and who begin to doubt His

authority when He begins to rebuke our sins.

The man that said We know,' and then proceeded to tell Christ the

grounds upon which He was accepted by him, was not in the position

which becomes sinful men drawing near to their Saviour. We know that

Thou art a Teacher'--contrast that, with its ring of complacency, and,

if not superior, at least co-ordinate, authority, with Jesus! Master!

have mercy on me,' or with Lord! save or I perish,' and you get the

difference between the way in which a formalist, conceited of his

knowledge, and a poor, perishing sinner, conscious of his ignorance and

need, go to the Saviour.

Further, this imperfect confession was of secondary value, because it

was built altogether upon miraculous evidence. Now, there has been a

great deal of exaggeration about the value of the evidence of miracle.

The undue elevation to which it was lifted in the apologetic literature

of the eighteenth century, when it was almost made out as if there was

no other proof that Jesus came from God than that He wrought miracles,

has naturally led, in this generation and in the last one, to an

equally exaggerated undervaluing of its worth. Jesus Christ did appeal

to signs; He did also most distinctly place faith that rested merely

upon miracle as second best; when He said, for instance, If ye believe

not Me, yet believe the works.' Nicodemus says, We know that Thou art a

Teacher sent from God, because no man can do these miracles except God

be with him.' Ah! Nicodemus! did not the substance of the teaching

reveal the source of the teaching even more completely than the

miracles that accompanied it? Surely, if I may use an old illustration,

the bell that rings in to the sermon (which is the miracles) is less

conclusive as to the divine source of the teaching than is the sermon

itself. Christ Himself is His own best evidence, and His words shine in

their own light, and need no signs in order to authenticate their

source. The signs are there, and are precious in my eyes less as

credentials of His authority than as revelations of His character and

His work. They are wonders; that is much. They are proofs; as I

believe. But, high above both of these characteristics, they are signs

of the spiritual work that He does, and manifestations of His redeeming

power. And so a faith that had no ears for the ring of the divine voice

in the words, and no eyes for the beauty and perfection of the

character, was vulgar and low and unreliable, inasmuch as it could give

no better reason for itself than that Jesus had wrought miracles,

I need not remind you of how noticeable it is that at this very early

stage in our Lord's ministry there were a sufficient number of miracles

done to be qualified by the Evangelist as many,' and to have been a

very powerful factor in bringing about this real, though imperfect,

faith. John has only told us of one miracle prior to this; and the

other Evangelists do not touch upon these early days of our Lord's

ministry at all. So that we are to think of a whole series of works of

power and supernatural grace which have found no record in these short

narratives. How much more Jesus Christ was, and did, and said, than any

book can ever tell! These are but parts of His ways; a whisper of His

power. The fulness of it remains unrevealed after all revelation.

But the central deficiency of this confession lies in the altogether

inadequate conception of Jesus Christ and His work which it embodies.

We know that Thou art a Teacher, a miracle-worker, a man sent from God,

and in communion with Him.' These are large recognitions, far too large

to be spoken of any but a select few of the sons of men. But they fall

miserably beneath the grandeur, and do not even approach within sight

of the central characteristic, of Christ and of His work. Nicodemus is

the type of large numbers of men nowadays. All the people that have a

kind of loose, superficial connection with Christianity re-echo

substantially his words. They compliment Jesus Christ out of His

divinity and out of His redeeming work, and seem to think that they are

rather conferring an honour upon Christianity when they condescend to

say, We, the learned pundits of literature; we, the arbiters of taste;

we, the guides of opinion; we, the writers in newspapers and magazines

and periodicals; we, the leaders in social and philanthropic

movements--we recognise that Thou art a Teacher.' Yes, brethren, and

the recognition is utterly inadequate to the facts of the case, and is

insult, and not recognition.

II. Let me ask you to look now, in the next place, at the way in which

Jesus Christ deals with this imperfect confession.

It was a great thing for a young Rabbi from Nazareth, who had no

certificate from the authorities, to find an opening thus into the very

centre of the Sanhedrim. There is nothing in life, to an ardent young

soul, at the beginning of his career--especially if he feels that he

has a burden laid upon him to deliver to his fellows--half so sweet as

the early recognition by some man of wisdom and weight and influence,

that he too is a messenger from God. In later years praise and

acknowledgment cloy. And one might have expected some passing word from

the Master that would have expressed such a feeling as that, if He had

been only a young Teacher seeking for recognition. I remember that in

that strange medley of beauty and absurdity, the Koran, somewhere or

other, there is an outpouring of Mahomet's heart about the blessedness

of his first finding a soul that would believe in him. And it is

strange that Jesus Christ had no more welcome for this man than the

story tells that He had. For He meets him without a word of

encouragement; without a word that seemed to recognise even a growing

and a groping confidence, and yet He would not quench the smoking

flax.' Yes! sometimes the kindest way to deal with an imperfect

conception is to show unsparingly why it is imperfect; and sometimes

the apparent repelling of a partial faith is truly the drawing to

Himself by the Christ of the man, though his faith be not approved.

So, notice how our Lord meets the imperfections of this acknowledgment.

He begins by pointing out what is the deepest and universal need of

men. Nicodemus had said, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a Teacher come

from God.' And Christ says, Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must be

born again.' What has that to do with Nicodemus's acknowledgment?

Apparently nothing; really everything. For, if you will think for a

moment, you will see how it meets it precisely, and forces the Rabbi to

deepen his conception of the Lord. The first thing that you and I want,

for our participation in the Kingdom of God, is a radical out-and-out

change in our whole character and nature. Ye must be born again'; now,

whatever more that means, it means, at all events, this--a

thorough-going renovation and metamorphosis of a man's nature, as the

sorest need that the world and all the individuals that make up the

world have.

The deepest ground of that necessity lies in the fact of sin. Brother,

we can only verify our Lord's assertion by honestly searching the

depths of our own hearts, and looking at ourselves in the light of God.

Think what is meant when we say, He is Light, and in Him is no darkness

at all.' Think of that absolute purity, that, to us, awful aversion

from all that is evil, from all that is sinful. Think of what sort of

men they must be who can see the Lord. And then look at yourself. Are

we fit to pass that threshold? Are we fit to gaze into that Face? Is it

possible that we should have fellowship with Him? Oh, brethren, if we

rightly meditate upon two facts, the holiness of God and our own

characters, I think we shall feel that Jesus Christ has truly stated

the case when He says, Ye must be born again.' Unless you and I can get

ourselves radically changed, there is no Heaven for us; there is no

fellowship with God for us. We must stand before Him, and feel that a

great gulf is fixed between us and Him.

And so when a man comes with his poor little Thou art a Teacher,' no

words are wanted in order to set in glaring light the utter inadequacy

of such a conception as that. What the world wants is not a Teacher, it

is a Life-giver. What men want is not to be told the truth; they know

it already. What they want is not to be told their duty; they know that

too. What they want is some power that shall turn them clean round. And

what each of us wants before we can see the Lord is that, if it may be,

something shall lay hold of us, and utterly change our natures, and

express from our hearts the black drop that lies there tainting

everything.

Now, this necessity is met in Jesus Christ. For there were two musts'

in His talk with Nicodemus, and both of them bore directly on the one

purpose of deepening Nicodemus's inadequate conception of what He was

and what He did. He said, Ye must be born again,' in order that his

hearer, and we, might lay to heart this, that we need something more

than a Teacher, even a Life-giver; and He said, The Son of Man must be

lifted up,' in order that we might all know that in Him the necessity

is met, and that the Son of Man, who came down from Heaven, and is in

Heaven, even whilst He is on earth, is the sole ladder by which men can

ascend into Heaven and gaze upon God.

Thus it is Christ's work as Redeemer, Christ's sacrifice on the Cross,

Christ's power as bringing to the world a new and holy life, and

breathing it into all that trust in Him, which make the very centre of

His work. Set by the side of that this other, Thou art a Teacher sent

from God.' Ah, brethren, that will not do; it will not do for you and

me! We want something a great deal deeper than that. The secret of

Jesus is not disclosed until we have passed into the inner shrine,

where we learn that He is the Sacrifice for the world, and the Source

and Fountain of a new life. I beseech you, take Christ's way of dealing

with this certificate of His character given by the Rabbi who did not

know his own necessities, and ponder it.

Mark the underlying principle which is here--viz. if you want to

understand Christ you must understand sin; and whoever thinks lightly

of it will think meanly of Him. An underestimate of the reality, the

universality, the gravity of the fact of sin lands men in the

superficial and wholly impotent conception, Rabbi! Thou art a Teacher

sent from God.' A true knowledge of myself as a sinful man, of my need

of pardon, of my need of cleansing, of my need of a new nature, which

must be given from above, and cannot be evolved from within, leads me,

and I pray it may lead you, to cast yourself down before Him, with no

complaisant words of intellectual recognition upon your lips, but with

the old cry, Lord! be merciful to me a sinner.'

III. And now, dear friends, one last word. Notice when and where this

imperfect disciple was transformed into a courageous confessor.

We do not know what came immediately of this conversation. We only know

that some considerable time after, Nicodemus had not screwed himself up

to the point of acknowledging out and out, like a brave man, that he

was Christ's follower; but that he timidly ventured in the Sanhedrim to

slip in a remonstrance ingeniously devised to conceal his own opinions,

and yet to do some benefit to Christ, when he said, Does our law judge

any man before it hear him?' And, of course, the timid remonstrance was

swept aside, as it deserved to be, by the ferocious antagonism of his

co-Sanhedrists.

But when the Cross came, and it had become more dangerous to avow

discipleship, he plucked up courage, or rather courage flowed into him

from that Cross, and he went boldly and craved the body of Jesus,' and

got it, and buried it. No doubt when he looked at Jesus hanging on the

Cross, he remembered that night in Jerusalem when the Lord had said,

The Son of Man must be lifted up,' and he remembered how He had spoken

about the serpent lifted in the wilderness, and a great light blazed in

upon him, which for ever ended all hesitation and timidity for him. And

so he was ready to be a martyr, or anything else, for the sake of Him

whom he now found to be far more than a Teacher,' even the Sacrifice by

whose stripes he was healed.

Dear brethren, I bring that Cross to you now, and pray you to see there

Christ's real work for us, and for the world. He has taught us, but He

has done more. He has not only spoken, He has died. He has not only

shown us the path on which to walk, He has made it possible for us to

walk in it. He is not merely one amongst the noble band that have

guided and inspired and instructed humanity, but He stands alone--not a

Teacher, but the Redeemer, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins

of the world.'

If He is a Teacher, take His teachings, and what are they? These, that

He is the Son of God; that He came from God'; that He went to God';

that He gives His life a ransom for many'; that He is to be the Judge

of mankind; that if we trust in Him, our sins are forgiven and our

nature is renewed. Do not go picking and choosing amongst His

teachings, for these which I have named are as surely His as Whatsoever

ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them,' or any

other of the moral teachings which the world professes to admire. Take

the whole teachings of the whole Christ, and you will confess Him to be

the Redeemer of your souls, and the Life-giver by whom, and by whom

alone, we enter the Kingdom of God.

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WIND AND SPIRIT

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and them hearest the sound thereof,

but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every

one that is born of the Spirit.'--JOHN iii. 8.

Perhaps a gust of night wind swept round the chamber where Nicodemus

sat listening to Jesus, and gave occasion for this condensed parable.

But there is occasion sufficient for it in the word Spirit,' which,

both in the language in which our Lord addressed the ruler of the

Sanhedrim, and in that which John employed in recording the

conversation, as in our own English, means both spirit' and breath.'

This double signification of the word gives rise to the analogies in

our text, and it also raises the question as to the precise meaning of

the text. There are two alternatives, one adopted by our Authorised and

Revised Version, and one which you will find relegated to the margin of

the latter. We may either read the wind bloweth' or the Spirit

breathes.' I must not be tempted here to enter into a discussion of the

grounds upon which the one or the other of these two renderings may be

preferred. Suffice it to say that I adhere to the rendering which lies

before us, and find here a comparison between the salient

characteristics of the physical fact and the operations of the Divine

Spirit upon men's spirits.

But then, there is another step to be taken. Our Lord has just been

laying down the principle that like begets like, that flesh produces

flesh, and spirit, spirit. And so, applying that principle, He says

here, not as might be expected, So is the work of the Divine Spirit in

begetting new life in men,' but So is he that is born of the Spirit.'

There are three things brought into relation with one another: the

physical fact; the operations of the Spirit of God, of which that

physical fact in its various characteristics may be taken as a symbol;

and the result of its operations in the new man who is made after the

image of Him that created him.'

It is to the last of these that I wish to turn. Here you have the ideal

of the Christian life, considered as the product of the free Spirit of

God, the picture of what all Christian people have the capacity of

being, the obligation to be, and are, just in the measure in which that

new life, which the Spirit of God bestows, is dominant in them and

moulding their character. So I take these characteristics just as they

arise.

I. Here you have the freedom of the new life.

The wind bloweth where it listeth.' Of course, in these days of weather

forecasts and hoisting cones, we know that the wind is subject to as

rigid physical laws as any other phenomena. But Jesus Christ speaks

here, as the Bible always speaks about Nature, from two points of

view--one the popular, regarding the thing as it looks on the surface,

and the other what I may call the poetico-devout--finding sermons in

stones, books in the running brooks,' and hints of the spiritual world

in all the phenomena of the natural. So, just as in spite of

meteorological science, there has passed into common speech the

proverbial simile as free as the wind,' so Jesus Christ says here, The

wind bloweth where it listeth, . . . so is every one that is born of

the Spirit.' He passes by the intermediate link, the Spirit that is the

parent of the life, and deals with the resulting life and declares that

it is self-impelled and self-directed. Is that a characteristic to be

desired or admired? Is doing as we list precisely the description of

the noblest life? It is the description of the purely animal one. It is

the description of an entirely ignoble and base one. It may become the

description of an atrociously criminal one. But we do not generally

think that a man that says Thus I will; thus I command; let the fact

that I will it stand in the place of all reason,' is speaking from a

lofty point of view.

But there are two sorts of listing.' There is the listing which is the

yielding to the mob of ignoble passions and clamant desires of the

animal nature within us, and there is the listing' which is obeying the

impulses of a higher will, that has been blended with ours. And there

you come to the secret of true freedom, which does not consist in doing

as I like, but in liking to do as God wishes me to do. When our Lord

says where it listeth,' He implies that a change has passed over a man,

when that new life is born within him, whereby the law, the known will

of God, is written upon his heart, and, inscribed on these fleshly

tables, becomes no longer an iron force external to him, but a vital

impulse within him. That is freedom, to have my better will absolutely

conterminous and coincident with the will of God, so far as I know it.

Just as a man is not imprisoned by limits beyond which he has no desire

to go, so freedom, and elevation, and nobility come by obeying, not the

commands of an external authority, but the impulse of an inward life.

Ye have not received the spirit of bondage,' because God hath given us

the Spirit of power, and of love, and of self-control, which keeps down

that base and inferior listing,' and elevates the higher and the nobler

one, Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,' because duty

has become delight, and there is no desire in the new and higher nature

for anything except that which God enjoins. The true freedom is when,

by the direction of our will, we change must' into I delight to do Thy

will.' So we are set free from the bondage and burden of a law that is

external, and is not loved, and are brought into the liberty of, for

dear love's sake, doing the will of the beloved.

Myself shall to my darling be

Both law and impulse,'

says one of the poets about a far inferior matter. It is true in

reference to the Christian life, and the liberty wherewith Christ hath

made us free,'

But, then, in order freely to understand the sweep and the greatness of

this perfect law of liberty, we must remember that the new life is

implanted in us precisely in order that we may suppress, and, if need

be, cast out and exorcise, that lower listing,' of which I have said

that it is always ignoble and sometimes animal. For this freedom will

bring with it the necessity for continual warfare against all that

would limit and restrain it--namely, the passions and desires and

inclinations of our baser or nobler, but godless, self. These are, as

it were, deposed by the entrance of the new life. But it is a dangerous

thing to keep dethroned and discrowned tyrants alive, and the best

thing is to behead them, as well as to cast them from their throne. If

ye, through the Spirit, do put to death the deeds' and inclinations and

wills of the flesh, ye shall live'; and if you do not, they will live

and will kill you. So the freedom of the new life is a militant

freedom, and we have to fight to maintain it. As Burke said about the

political realm, the price of liberty is eternal vigilance,' so we say

about the new life of the Christian man--he is free only on condition

that he keeps well under hatches the old tyrants, who are ever plotting

and struggling to have dominion once again.

Still further, whilst this new life makes us free from the harshness of

a law that can only proclaim duty, and also makes us free from our own

baser selves, it makes us free from all human authority. The true

foundation of the Christian democracy is that each individual soul has

direct and immediate access to, and direct and real possession of, God,

in his spirit and life. Therefore, in the measure in which we draw into

ourselves the new life and the Spirit of God shall we be independent of

men round us, and be able to say, With me it is a very small matter to

be judged of you or of man's judgment.' That new life ought to make men

original, in the deep and true sense of the word, as drawing their

conceptions of duty and their methods of life, not at second hand from

other men, but straight from God Himself. If the Christian Church was

fuller of that divine life than it is, it would be fuller of all

varieties of Christian beauty and excellence, and all these would be

the work of that one and the selfsame Spirit dividing to every man

severally as He will.' If this congregation were indeed filled with the

new life, there would be an exuberance of power, and a harmonious

diversity of characteristics about it, and a burning up of the

conventionalities of Christian profession such as we do not dream of

to-day. The wind bloweth where it listeth.'

II. Here we have this new life in its manifestation.

Thou hearest the sound,' or, as the Word might literally be rendered,

the voice thereof,' from the little whisper among the young soft leaves

of the opening beeches in our woods to-day, up to the typhoon that

spreads devastation over leagues of tropical ocean. That voice, now a

murmur, now a roar, is the only manifestation of the unseen force that

sweeps around us. And if you are a Christian man or woman your new life

should be thus perceptible to others, in a variety of ways, no doubt,

and in many degrees of force. You cannot show its roots; you are bound

to show its fruits. You cannot lay bare your spirits, and say to the

world, Look! there is the presence of a divine germ in me,' but you can

go about amongst men, and witness to the possession of it by the life

that you live. There are a great many Christian people from whom, if

you were to listen ever so intently, you would not hear a sough or a

ripple. There is a dead calm; the rushing mighty wind' has died down;

and there is nothing but a greasy swell upon the windless ocean. The

wind bloweth,' and the sound' is heard. The wind ceases, and there is a

hideous silence. And that is the condition of many a man and woman that

has a name to live and is dead. Does anybody hear the whisper of that

breath in your life, Christian man? It is not for me to answer the

question; it is for you to ask it and answer it for yourselves.

And Christians should be in the world, as the very breath of life

amidst stagnation. When the Christian Church first sprung into being it

did come into that corrupt, pestilential march of ancient heathenism

with healing on its wings, and like fresh air from the pure hills into

some fever-stricken district. Wherever there has been a new outburst,

in the experience of individuals and of churches, of that divine life,

there has come, and the world has felt that there has come, a new force

that breathes over the dry bones, and they live. Alas, alas! that so

frequently the professing Christian Church has ceased to discharge its

plain function, to breathe on the slain that they may live.

They are curing, or say they are curing, consumption nowadays, by

taking the patient and keeping him in the open air, and letting the

wind of heaven blow freely about him. That, and not shutting people in

warm chambers, and coddling them with the prescriptions of social and

political reformation, that is the cure for the world's diseases.

Wherever the new life is vigorous in men, men will hear the sound

thereof, and recognise that it comes from heaven.

III. Lastly, here we have the new life in its double secret.

I have been saying that it has a means of manifestation which all

Christian people are bound to exemplify. But our Lord draws a broad

distinction between that which can be manifested and that which cannot.

As I said, you can show the leaves and the fruits; the roots are

covered. Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it

cometh, nor whither it goeth.'

The origin of that new life is hid with Christ in God.' And so, since

we are not dependent upon external things for the communication of the

life, we should not be dependent upon them for its continuation and its

nourishment, and we should realise that, if we are Christians, we are

living in two regions, and, though as regards the surface life we

belong to the things of time, as regards the deepest life, we belong to

eternity. All the surface springs may run dry. What then? As long as

there is a deep-seated fountain that comes welling up, the fields will

be green, and we may laugh at famine and drought. If it be true that

our lives are hid with Christ in God,' then it ought to be true that

the nourishments, as well as the direction and impulse of them, are

drawn from Him, and that we seek not so much for the abundance of the

things that minister to the external as for the fulness of those that

sustain the inward, the true life, the life of Christ in the soul.

The world does not know where that Christian life comes from. If you

are a Christian, you ought to bear in your character a certain

indefinable something that will suggest to the people round you that

the secret power of your life is other than the power which moulds

theirs. You may be naturalised, and you may speak fairly well the

language of the country in which you are a sojourner, but there ought

to be something in your accent which tells where you come from, and

betrays the foreigner. We ought to move amongst men, having about us

that which cannot be explained by what is enough to explain their

lives. A Christian life should be the manifestation to the world of the

supernatural.

They know not whence it cometh nor whither it goeth.' No; that new life

in its feeblest infancy, and before it speaks, if I may so say, is, by

its very existence, a prophet, and declares that there must be, beyond

this bank and shoal of time,' a region to which it is native, and in

which it may grow to maturity. You will find in your greenhouses

exotics that stand there, after all your pains and coals, stunted, and

seeming to sigh for the tropical heat which is their home. The earnest

of our inheritance, the first-fruits of the Spirit, the Christian life

which originated in, and is sustained by, the flowing of the divine

life into us, demands that, somehow or other, the stunted plant should

be lifted and removed into that higher house where these are

planted'--and what shall be the spread of its branches, and the lustre

of its leaves, and what the gorgeousness of its blossoms, and what the

perennial sweetness of its fruits then and there, it doth not yet

appear.'

They know not whither it goeth.' And even those who themselves possess

it know not, nor shall know, through the ages of a progressive

approximation to the ever-approached and never-attained perfection.

This spake He of the Holy Ghost, which they that believe on Him should

receive.' Trust Christ, and the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ

Jesus shall make you free from the law of sin and death.'

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THE BRAZEN SERPENT

Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.'--JOHN iii. 14.

This is the second of the instances in this Gospel in which our Lord

lays His hand upon an institution or incident of the Old Testament, as

shadowing forth some aspect of His work. In the first of these

instances, under the image of the ladder that Jacob saw, our Lord

presented Himself as the sole medium of communication between heaven

and earth; here He goes a step further into the heart of His work, and

under the image, very eloquent to the Pharisee to whom He was speaking,

of the brazen serpent lifted up on the pole in the desert, proclaims

Himself as the medium of healing and of life to a poisoned world.

Now, Nicodemus has a great many followers to-day. He took up a position

which many take up. He recognised Christ as a Teacher, and was willing

to accord to the almost unknown young man from Galilee the coveted

title of Rabbi.' He came to Him with a little touch of condescension,

and evidently thought that for him, a ruler of the Jews, a member of

the upper and educated classes, to be willing to speak of Jesus as a

Teacher, was an endorsement that the young aspirant might be gratified

to receive. Rabbi, we know that Thou art a Teacher sent from God'--but

he stopped there. He is not the only one who compliments Jesus Christ,

while he degrades Him from His unique position. Now, to this inadequate

conception of our Lord's Person and work, Christ opposed the solemn

insistence on the incapacity of human nature as it is, to enter into

communion with, and submission to, God. And then He passes on to

speak--in precise parallelism with the position that He took up when He

likened Himself to the Ladder of Jacob's vision--of Himself as being

the Son of Man that came down from Heaven, and therefore is able to

reveal heavenly things. In my text He further unveils in symbol the

mystery and dignity of His Person and of His work, whilst He speaks of

a mysterious lifting up of this Son of Man who came down from heaven.

These are the truths that the conception of Christ as a great Teacher

needs for its completion; the contrariety of human nature with the

divine will, the Incarnation of the Son of God, the Crucifixion of the

Incarnate Son. And so we have here three points, to which I desire to

turn, as setting forth the conception of His own work which Jesus

Christ presented as completing the conception of it, to which Nicodemus

had attained.

I. There is, first, the lifting up of the Son of Man.

Now, of course, the sole purpose of setting that brazen serpent on the

pole was to render it conspicuous, and all that Nicodemus could then

understand by the symbol was that, in some unknown way, this

heaven-descended Son of Man should be set forth before Israel and the

world as being the Healer of all their diseases. But we are wiser,

after the event, than the ruler of the Jews could be at the threshold

of Christ's ministry. We have also to remember that this is not the

only occasion, though it is the first, on which our Lord used this very

significant expression. For twice over in this Gospel we find it upon

His lips--once when, addressing the unbelieving multitude, He says When

ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He'; and

once when in soliloquy, close on Calvary, He says, as the vision of a

world flocking to Him rises before Him on occasion of the wish of a few

Greek proselytes to see Him, I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men

unto Me.' We do not need, though we have, the Evangelist's commentary,

this He spake signifying what death He should die.'

So, if we accept the historical veracity of this Gospel, we here

perceive Jesus Christ, at the very beginning of His career, and before

the dispositions of the nation towards Him had developed themselves in

action, discerning its end, and seeing, gaunt and grim before Him, the

Cross that was lifted up on Calvary. Enthusiasts and philanthropists

and apostles of all sorts, in the regions of science and beneficence

and morals and religion, begin their career with trusting that their

brethren should have understood' that God was speaking through them.

But no illusion of that sort, according to these Evangelists, drew

Jesus Christ out of His seclusion at Nazareth and impelled Him on His

career. From the beginning He knew that the Cross was to be the end.

That Cross was not to Him a necessity, accepted as the price of

faithfulness in doing His work, so that His attitude was, I will speak

what is in Me, though I die for it,' but it was to Him the very heart

of the work which He came to do. Therefore, after He had said to the

ruler of the Jews that the Son of Man, as descended from Heaven, was

able to speak of heavenly things, He added the deeper necessity, He

must be lifted up.' Where lay the must'? In the requirement of the work

which He had set Himself to do. Beneath this great saying there lies a

pathetic, stern, true conception of the condition of human nature. That

desert encampment, with the poisoned men dying on every hand, is the

emblem under which Jesus Christ, the gentlest and the sweetest soul

that ever lived, looked out upon humanity. And it was because the facts

of human nature called for something far more than a teacher that He

said the Son of Man must be lifted up.' For what they needed, and what

He had set Himself to bring, could only be brought by One who yielded

Himself up for the sins of the whole world.

But that must,' which thus arose from the requirements of the task that

He had set before Him, had its source in His own heart; it was no

necessity imposed upon Him from without. True, it was a necessity laid

on Him by filial obedience, but also true, it was the necessity

accepted by Him in pursuance of the impulse of His own heart. He must

die because He must save, and He must save because He loved. So He was

not nailed to the Cross by the nails and hammers of the Roman soldiers,

and the taunt that was flung at Him as He hung there had a deeper

meaning, as scoffs thrown at Him and His cause ordinarily have, than

the scoffers understood: He saved others,' and therefore Himself He

cannot save.'

So here we have Christ accepting, as well as discerning, the Cross. And

we have more than that. We have Christ looking at the Cross as being,

not humiliation, but exaltation. The Son of Man must be lifted up.' And

what does that mean? It means the same thing that He said when, near

the end, He declared, The hour is come that the Son of Man should be

glorified.' We are accustomed to speak--and we speak rightly--of His

death as being the lowest point of the humiliation which was inherent

in the very fact of His humanity. He condescended to be born; He

stooped yet more to die. But whilst that is true, the other side is

also true--that in the Cross Christ is lifted up, and that it is His

Throne. For what see we there? The highest exhibition, the tenderest

revelation, of His perfect love. And what see we there besides? The

supreme manifestation of the highest power.

'Twas great to speak a world from nought,

'Tis greater to redeem.'

To save humanity, to make it possible that men should receive that

second birth, and should enter into the Kingdom of God--that was a

greater work, because a work not only of creation, but of restoration,

than it was to send forth the stars on their courses and to preserve'

the ancient heavens from wrong.' There is a revelation of divine might

when we lift up our eyes on high,' and see how, because He is great in

power, not one faileth.' But there is a mightier revelation of divine

power when we see how, from amidst the ruins of humanity, He can

restore the divine image, and piece together, as it were, without sign

of flaw or crack or one fragment wanting, the fair image that was

shattered into fragments by the blow of Sin's heavy mace. Power in its

highest operation, power in its tenderest efficacy, power in its widest

sweep, are set forth on the Cross of Christ, and that weak Man hanging

there, dying in the dark, is the power of God' as well as the wisdom of

God.' The Cross is Christ's Throne, but it is His sovereign

manifestation of love and power only if it is what, as I believe He

told us it was, and what His servants from His lips caught the

interpretation of it as being, the death for the sins of the

sin-stricken world. Unless we can believe that, when He died, He died

for us, I know not why Christ's death should appeal to our love. But if

we recognise--as I pray that we all may recognise--that our deep need

for something far more than Teacher or Pattern has been met in that

great one Sacrifice for sins for ever,' then the magnetism of the Cross

begins to tell, and we understand what He meant when He said, I, if I

be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.' Brethren, the Cross is His

Throne, from which He rules the world, and if you strike His sacrifice

for sins out of your conception of His work, you have robbed Him of

sovereignty, and taken out of His hand the sceptre by which He governs

the hearts and wills of rebellious and restored men.

II. Notice, again, how we have here the look at the uplifted Son of

Man.

I do not need to paint for you what your own imaginations can

sufficiently paint for yourselves--the scene in the wilderness where

the dying men from the very outskirts of the camp could turn a filmy

eye to the brazen serpent hanging in their midst. That look is the

symbol of what we need, in order that the life-giving power of Christ

should enter into our death. There is no better description of the act

of Christian faith than that picture of the dying Israelite turning his

languid eye to the symbol of healing and life. That trust which Jesus

emphasises here in whosoever believeth on Him,' He opposes very

emphatically to Nicodemus's confession, We know that Thou art a

Teacher.' We know--you have to go a step further, Nicodemus! We know';

well and good, but are you included in whosoever believeth'? Faith is

an advance on credence. There is an intellectual side to it, but its

essence is what is the essence of trust always, the act of the will

throwing itself on that which is discerned to be trustworthy. You know

that a given man is reliable--that is not relying on him. You have to

go a step further. And so, dear brethren, you may believe thirty-nine

or thirty-nine thousand Articles with an unfaltering credence, and you

may be as far away from faith as if you did not believe one of them.

There may be a perfect belief and an absolute want of faith. And on the

other hand, blessed be God! there may be a real and an operative trust

with a very imperfect or mistaken creed. The wild flowers on the rock

bloom fair and bright, though they have scarcely any soil in which to

strike their roots, and the plants in the most fertile garden may fail

to produce flowers and seed. So trust and credence are not always of

the same magnitude.

This trust is no arbitrary condition. The Israelite was bid to turn to

the brazen serpent. There was no connection between his look and his

healing, except in so far as the symbol was a help to, and looking at

it was a test of, his faith in the healing power of God. But it is no

arbitrary appointment, as many people often think it is, which connects

inseparably together the look of faith and the eternal life that Christ

gives. For seeing that salvation is no mere external gift of shutting

up some outward Hell and opening the door to some outward Heaven, but

is a state of heart and mind, of relation to God, the only way by which

that salvation can come into a man's heart is that he, knowing his need

of it, shall trust Christ, and through Him the new life will flow into

his heart. Faith is trust, and trust is the stretching out of the hand

to take the precious gift, the opening of the heart for the influx of

the grace, the eating of the bread, the drinking of the water, of life.

It is the only possible condition. God forbid that I should even seem

to depreciate other forms of healing men's evils and redressing men's

wrongs, and diminishing the sorrows of humanity! We welcome them all;

but education, art, culture, refinement, improved environment, bettered

social and political conditions, whilst they do a great deal, do not go

down to the bottom of the necessity. And after you have built your

colleges and art museums and stately pleasure-houses, and set every man

in an environment that is suited to develop him, you will find out what

surely the world might have found out already, that, as in some stately

palace built in the Campagna, the malaria is in the air, and steals in

at the windows, and infects all the inhabitants. Thank God for all

these other things! but you cannot heal a man who has poison in his

veins by administering cosmetics, and you cannot put out Vesuvius with

a jugful of water. If the camp is to be healed, the Christ must be

lifted up.

III. And now, lastly, here we have the life that comes with a look at

the lifted-up Son of Man.

Those of you who are using the Revised Version will see that there is a

little change made here, partly by the exclusion of a clause and partly

by changing the order of the words. The alteration is not only nearer

the original text, but brings out a striking thought. It reads that

whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life.' Now, it is far too

late a period of my discourse to enlarge upon all that these great

words would suggest to us, but let me just, in a sentence or two, mark

the salient points.

Eternal life'; do not bring that down to the narrow and inadequate

conception of unending existence. It involves that, but it means a

great deal more. It means a life of such a sort as is worth calling

life, which is a life in union with God, and therefore full of

blessedness, full of purity, full of satisfaction, full of desire and

aspiration, and all these with the stamp of unendingness deeply

impressed upon them. And that is what comes to us through the look. Not

only is the process of dying arrested, but there is substituted for it

a new process of growing possession of a new life. You must be born

again,' Christ had been saying to Nicodemus. The change that passes

upon a man when once he has anchored his trust on Jesus Christ, the

uplifted Son of Man, is so profound that it is nothing else than a new

birth, and a new life comes into his veins untainted by the poison, and

with no proclivity to death.

May have eternal life'--now, here, on the instant. That eternal life is

no future gift to be bestowed upon mortal men when they have passed

through the agony of death, but it is a gift which comes to us here,

and may come to any man on the instant of his looking to Jesus Christ.

May in Him have eternal life'--union with Christ by faith, that

profound incorporation--if I may use the word--into Him, which the New

Testament sets forth in all sorts of aspects as the very foundation of

the blessings of Christianity; that union is the condition of eternal

life. So, dear brethren, we all need that the poison shall be cast out

of our veins. We all need that the tendency downwards to a condition

which can only be described as death may be arrested, and the motion

reversed. We all need that our knowledge shall be vitalised into faith.

We all need that the past shall be forgiven, and the power of sin upon

us in the present shall be cancelled. The blood of Jesus Christ

cleanseth from all sin,' because it was shed for the remission of the

sins of the many, and is transfused, an untainted principle of life,

into our veins. What Jesus said to Nicodemus by night in that quiet

chamber in Jerusalem, what He said in effect and act upon the Cross,

when uplifted there, is what He says to each of us from the Throne

where He is now lifted up: Whosoever believeth shall in Me have eternal

life.' Take Him at His word, and you will find that it is true.

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CHRIST'S MUSTS

. . . Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.'--JOHN iii. 14.

I have chosen this text for the sake of one word in it, that solemn

must' which was so often on our Lord's lips. I have no purpose of

dealing with the remainder of this clause, nor indeed with it at all,

except as one instance of His use of the expression. But I have felt it

might he interesting, and might set old truths in a brighter light, if

we gather together the instances in which Christ speaks of the great

necessity which dominated His life, and shaped even small acts.

The expression is most frequently used in reference to the Passion and

Resurrection. There are many instances in the Gospels, in which He

speaks of that must. The first of these is that of my text. Then there

is another class, of which His word to His mother when a

twelve-year-old child may be taken as a type: Wist ye not that I must

be about My Father's business?' where the mysterious consciousness of a

special relation to God in the child's heart drew Him to the Temple and

to His Father's work. Other similar instances are those in which He

responded to the multitude when they wanted to keep Him to themselves:

I must preach in other cities also'; or as when He said, I must work

the works of Him that sent Me while it is day.'

Yet another aspect of the same necessity is presented when, looking far

beyond the earthly work and suffering, He discerned the future triumph

which was to be the issue of these, and said, Other sheep I have . . .

them also I must bring.'

And yet another is in reference to a very small matter: His selection

of a place for a few hours' rest on His last fateful journey to

Jerusalem, when He said, Zaccheus, . . . to-day I must abide at thy

house.'

Now, if we put these instances together, we shall get some precious

glimpses into our Lord's heart, and His view of life.

I. Here we see Christ recognising and accepting the necessity for His

death.

My text, if we accept John's Gospel, contributes an altogether new

element to our conception of our Lord as announcing His death. For the

other three Gospels lay emphasis on it as being part of His teaching,

especially during the later stage of His ministry. But it does not

follow that He began to think about it or to see it, when He began to

speak about it. There are reasons for the earlier comparative

reticence, and there is no ground for the conclusion that then first

began to dawn upon a disappointed enthusiast the grim reality that His

work was not going to prosper, and that martyrdom was necessary. That

is a notion that has been frequently upheld of late years, but to me it

seems altogether incongruous with the facts of the case. And, if John's

Gospel is a true record, that theory is shivered against this text,

which represents Him at the very beginning of His career--the time

when, according to that other theory, He was full of the usual buoyant

and baseless anticipations of a reformer commencing His course--as

telling Nicodemus, Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.' In like

manner, in the previous chapter of this same Gospel, we have the

significant though enigmatical utterance: Destroy this Temple, and in

three days I will raise it up'; with the Evangelist's authoritative

comment: He spake of the Temple of His body.' So, from the beginning of

His career, the end was clear before Him.

And why must He go to the Cross? Not merely, as the other Evangelists

put it, in order that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the

prophets.' It was not that Jesus must die because the prophets had said

that Messiah should, but that the prophets had said that Messiah should

because Jesus must. There was a far deeper necessity than the

fulfilment of any prophetic utterance, even the necessity which shaped

that utterance. The work of Jesus Christ could not be done unless He

died. He could not be the Saviour of the world unless He was the

sacrifice for the sins of the world.

We cannot see all the grounds of that solemn imperative, but this we

can see, that it was because of the requirements of the divine

righteousness, and because of the necessities of sinful men. And so

Christ's was no martyr's death, who had to die as the penalty of the

faithful discharge of His duty. It was not the penalty that He paid for

doing His work, but it was the work itself. Not that gracious life, nor

the loveliness of perfect deeds,' nor His words of sweet wisdom, nor

His acts of transcendent power, equalled only by the pity that moved

the power, completed His task, but He came to give His life a ransom

for many.'

Must' is a hard word. It may express an unwelcome necessity. Was this

necessity unwelcome? When He said, The Son of Man must be lifted up,'

was He shrinking, or reluctantly submitting? Ah, no! He must die

because He would save, and He would save because He did love. His

filial obedience to God coincided with His pity for men: and not merely

in obedience to the requirements of the divine righteousness, but in

compassion for the necessities of sinners, necessity was laid upon Him.

Oh, brethren! nothing held Christ to the Cross but His own desire to

save us. Neither priests nor Romans carried Him thither. What fastened

Him to it was not the nails driven by rude hands. And the reason why He

did not, as the taunters bade Him do, come down from it, was neither a

physical nor a moral necessity unwelcome to Himself, but the yielding

of His own will to do all which was needed for man's salvation.

This sacrifice was bound to the altar by the cords of love. We have

heard of martyrs who have refused to be tied to the stake, and have

kept themselves motionless in the centre of the fierce flames by the

force of their wills. Jesus Christ fastened Himself to the Cross and

died because He would.

And, oh! if we think of that sweet, serene life as having clear before

it from the very first steps that grim end, how infinitely it gains in

pathetic beauty and in heart-touchingness! What wonderful

self-abnegation! How he was at leisure from Himself, with a heart of

pity for every sorrow, and loins girt for all service, though during

all His life the Cross closed the vista! Think that human shrinking was

felt by Him, think that it was so held back that His purpose never

faltered, think that each of us may say, He must die because He would

save me'; and then ask, What shall I render to the Lord for all His

benefits toward me?'

II. In a second class of these utterances, we see Christ impelled by

filial obedience and the consciousness of His mission.

Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?' That was a

strange utterance for a boy of twelve. It seems to negative the

supposition that what is called the Messianic consciousness' dawned

upon Jesus Christ first after His baptism and the descent of the

Spirit. But however that may be, it and the similar passages to which I

have already referred, bearing upon His discharge of His work prior to

His death, teach that the necessity was an inward necessity springing

from His consciousness of Sonship, and His recognition of the work that

He had to do. And so He is our great Example of spontaneous obedience,

which does violence to itself if it does not obey. It was instinct that

sent the boy into the Temple. Where should a Son be but in His Father's

house? How could He not be doing His Father's business?

Thus He stands before us, the pattern for the only obedience that is

worth calling so, the obedience which would be pained and ill at ease

unless it were doing the work of God. Religion is meant to make it a

second nature, or, as I have ventured to call it, an instinct--a

spontaneous, uncalculating, irrepressible desire--to be in fellowship

with God, and to be doing His will. That is the meaning of our

Christianity. There is no obedience in reluctant obedience; forced

service is slavery, not service. Christianity is given for the specific

purpose that it may bring us so into touch with Jesus Christ as that

the mind which was in Him may be in us; and that we too may be able to

say, with a kind of wonder that people should have expected to find us

in any other place, or doing anything else, Wist ye not that because I

am a Son, I must be about my Father's business?' As certainly as the

sunflower follows the sun, so certainly will a man animated by the mind

that was in Jesus Christ, like Him find his very life's breath in doing

the Father's will.

So then, brethren, what about our grudging service? What about our

reluctant obedience? What about the widespread mistake that religion

prohibits wished-for things and enforces unwelcome duties? If my

Christianity does not make me recoil from what it forbids, and spring

eagerly to what it commends, my Christianity is of very little use. If

when in the Temple we are like idle boys in school, always casting

glances at the clock and the door, and wishing ourselves outside, we

may just as well be out as in. Glad obedience is true obedience. Only

he who can say, Thy law is within my heart, and I do Thy will because I

love Thee, and cannot but do as Thou desirest,' has found the joy

possible to a Christian life. It is not harsh and crabbed,' as those

that look upon it from the outside may suppose,' but musical and full

of sweetness. There is nothing more blessed than when I choose' covers

exactly the same ground as I ought.' And when duty is delight, delight

will never become disgust, nor joy pass away.

III. We see, in yet another use of this great must,' Christ

anticipating His future triumph.

Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring,

and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd.' Striking as these words

are in themselves, they are still more striking when we notice their

connection; for they follow immediately upon His utterance about laying

down His life for the sheep. So, then, this was a work beyond the

Cross, and whatever it was, it was to be done after He had died.

I need not point out to you how far afield Christ's vision goes out

into the dim, waste places, where on the dark mountains the straying

sheep are torn and frightened and starving. I need not dwell upon how

far ahead in the future His glance travels, or how magnificent and how

rebuking to our petty narrowness this great word is. There shall be one

flock' (not fold); and they shall be one, not because they are within

the bounds of any visible fold,' but because they are gathered round

the one Shepherd, and in their common relation to Him are knit together

in unity.

But what sort of a Man is this who considers that His widest work is to

be done by Him after He is dead? Them also I must bring.' Thou? how?

when? Surely such words as these, side by side with a clear prevision

of the death that was so soon to come, are either meaningless or the

utterance of an arrogance bordering on insanity, or they anticipate

what an Evangelist declares did take place--that the Lord was taken up

into heaven and sat at the right hand of God,' whilst His servants went

everywhere preaching the Word, the Lord also working with them and

confirming the Word' with the signs He wrought.

Them also I must bring.' That is not merely a necessity rooted in the

nature of God and the wants of men. It is not merely a necessity

springing from Christ's filial obedience and sense of a mission; but it

is a must' of destiny, a must' which recognises the sure results of His

passion; a must' which implies the power of the Cross to be the

reconciliation of the world. And so for all pessimistic thoughts

to-day, or at any time, and when Christian men's hearts may be

trembling for the Ark of God--although, perhaps, there may be little

reason for the tremor--and in the face of all blatant antagonisms and

of proud Goliaths despising the foolishness of preaching,' we fall back

upon Christ's great must.' It is written in the councils of Heaven more

unchangeably than the heavens; it is guaranteed by the power of the

Cross; it is certain, by the eternal life of the crucified Saviour,

that He will one day be the King of humanity, and must bring His

wandering sheep to couch in peace, one flock round one Shepherd.

IV. Lastly, we have Christ applying the greatest principle to the

smallest duty.

Zaccheus! make haste and come down; to-day I must abide in thy house.'

Why must He? Because Zaccheus was to be saved, and was worth saving.

What was the must'? To stop for an hour or two on His road to the

Cross. So He teaches us that in a life penetrated by the thought of the

divine will, which we gladly obey, there are no things too great, and

none too trivial, to be brought under the dominion of that law, and to

be regulated by that divine necessity. Obedience is obedience, whether

in large things or in small. There is no scale of magnitude applicable

to the distinction between God's will and that which is not God's will.

Gravitation rules the motes that dance in the sunshine as well as the

mass of Jupiter. A triangle with its apex in the sun, and its base

beyond the solar system, has the same properties and comes under the

same laws as one that a schoolboy scrawls upon his slate. God's truth

is not too great to rule the smallest duties. The star in the East was

a guide to the humble house at Bethlehem, and there are starry truths

high in the heavens that avail for our guidance in the smallest acts of

life.

So, brethren, bring your doings under that all-embracing law of

duty--duty, which is the heathen expression for the will of God. There

are great regions of life in which lower necessities have play.

Circumstances, our past, bias and temper, relationship, friendship,

civic duty, and the like--all these bring their necessities; but let us

think of them all as being, what indeed they are, manifestations to us

of the will of our Father. There are great tracts of life in which

either of two courses may be right, and we are left to the decision of

choice rather than of duty; but high above all these, let us see

towering that divine necessity. It is a daily struggle to bring I will'

to coincide with I ought'; and there is only one adequate and always

powerful way of securing that coincidence, and that is to keep close to

Jesus Christ and to drink in His spirit. Then, when duty and delight

are conterminous, the rough places will be plain, and the crooked

things straight, and every mountain shall be brought low, and every

valley shall be exalted,' and life will be blessed, and service will be

freedom. Joy and liberty and power and peace will fill our hearts when

this is the law of our being; All that the Lord hath spoken, that must

I do.'

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THE LAKE AND THE RIVER

God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that

whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting

life.'--JOHN iii. 16.

I venture to say that my text shows us a lake, a river, a pitcher, and

a draught. God so loved the world'--that is the lake. A lake makes a

river for itself--God so loved the world that He gave His . . . Son.'

But the river does not quench any one's thirst unless he has something

to lift the water with: God so loved the world that He gave His . . .

Son, that whosoever believeth on Him.' Last comes the draught: shall

not perish, but have everlasting life.'

I. The great lake, God's love.

Before Jesus Christ came into this world no one ever dreamt of saying

God loves.' Some of the Old Testament psalmists had glimpses of that

truth and came pretty near expressing it. But among all the gods many

and lords many,' there were lustful gods and beautiful gods, and idle

gods, and fighting gods and peaceful gods: but not one of whom

worshippers said, He loves.' Once it was a new and almost incredible

message, but we have grown accustomed to it, and it is not strange any

more to us. But if we would try to think of what it means, the whole

truth would flash up into fresh newness, and all the miseries and

sorrows and perplexities of our lives would drift away down the wind,

and we should be no more troubled with them. God loves' is the greatest

thing that can be said by lips.

God . . . loved the world.' Now when we speak of loving a number of

individuals--the broader the stream, the shallower it is, is it not?

The most intense patriot in England does not love her one

ten-thousandth part as well as he loves his own little girl. When we

think or feel anything about a great multitude of people, it is like

looking at a forest. We do not see the trees, we see the whole wood.

But that is not how God loves the world. Suppose I said that I loved

the people in India, I should not mean by that that I had any feeling

about any individual soul of all those dusky millions, but only that I

massed them all together; or made what people call a generalisation of

them. But that is not the way in which God loves. He loves all because

He loves each. And when we say, God so loved the world,' we have to

break up the mass into its atoms, and to think of each atom as being an

object of His love. We all stand out in God's love just as we should do

to one another's eyes, if we were on the top of a mountain-ridge with a

clear sunset sky behind us. Each little black dot of the long

procession would be separately visible. And we all stand out like that,

every man of us isolated, and getting as much of the love of God as if

there was not another creature in the whole universe but God and

ourselves. Have you ever realised that when we say, He loved the

world,' that really means, as far as each of us is concerned, He loves

me? And just as the whole beams of the sun come pouring down into every

eye of the crowd that is looking up to it, so the whole love of God

pours down, not upon a multitude, an abstraction, a community, but upon

every single soul that makes up that community. He loves us all because

He loves us each. We shall never get all the good of that thought until

we translate it, and lay it upon our hearts. It is all very well to

say, Ah yes! God is love,' and it is all very well to say He loves the

world.' But I will tell you what is a great deal better--to say--what

Paul said--Who loved me and gave Himself for me.'

Now, there is one other suggestion that I would make to you before I go

on, and that is that all through the New Testament, but especially in

John's Gospel, the world' does not only mean men, but sinful men, men

separated from God. And the great and blessed truth taught here is

that, however I may drag myself away from God, I cannot drive Him away

from me, and that however little I may care for Him, or love Him, or

think about Him, it does not make one hairs-breadth of difference as to

the fact that He loves me. I know, of course, that if a man does not

love Him back again, God's love has to take shapes that it would not

otherwise take, which may be extremely inconvenient for the man. But

though the shape may alter, must alter, the fact remains; and every

sinful soul on the earth, including Judas Iscariot--who is said to head

the list of crimes--has God's love resting upon him.

II. The river.

Now, to go back to my metaphor, the lake makes a river. God so loved

the world that He gave His only begotten Son.'

So then, it was not Christ's death that turned God from hating and

being angry, but it was God's love that appointed Christ's death. If

you will only remember that, a great many of the shallow and popular

objections to the great doctrine of the Atonement disappear at once.

God so loved . . . that He gave.' But some people say that when we

preach that Jesus Christ died for our sins, that God's wrath might not

fall upon men, our teaching is immoral, because it means Christ came,

and so God loved.' It is the other way about, friend. God so loved

. . . that He gave.'

But now let me carry you back to the Old Testament. Do you remember the

story of the father taking his boy who carried the bundle of wood and

the fire, and tramping over the mountains till they reached the place

where the sacrifice was to be offered? Do you remember the boy's

question that brings tears quickly to the reader's eyes: Here is the

wood, and here is the fire, where is the lamb'? Do you not think it

would be hard for the father to steady his voice and say, My son, God

will provide the lamb'? And do you remember the end of that story? The

Angel of the Lord said unto Abraham, Because thou hast done this thing,

and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me, therefore

blessing I will bless thee,' etc. Remember that one of the Apostles

said, using the very same word that is used in Genesis as to Abraham's

giving up his son to God, He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him

up to the death for us all.' Does not that point to a mysterious

parallel? Somehow or other--we have no right to attempt to say

how--somehow or other, God not only sent His Son, as it is said in the

next verse to my text, but far more tenderly, wonderfully,

pathetically, God gave--gave up His Son, and the sacrifice was

enhanced, because it was His only begotten Son.

Ah! dear brethren, do not let us be afraid of following out all that is

included in that great word, God . . . loved the world.' For there is

no love which does not delight in giving, and there is no love that

does not delight in depriving itself, in some fashion, of what it

gives. And I, for my part, believe that Paul's words are to be taken in

all their blessed depth and wonderfulness of meaning when he says, He

gave up'--as well as gave--Him to the death for us all.'

And now, do you not think that we are able in some measure to estimate

the greatness of that little word so'? God so loved'--so deeply, so

holily, so perfectly--that He gave His only begotten Son'; and the gift

of that Son is, as it were, the river by which the love of God comes to

every soul in the world.

Now there are a great many people who would like to put the middle part

of this great text of ours into a parenthesis. They say that we should

bring the first words and the last words of this text together, and

never mind all that lies between. People who do not like the doctrine

of the Cross would say, God so loved the world that He gave . . .

everlasting life'; and there an end. If there is a God, and if He loves

the world, why cannot He save the world without more ado? There is no

need for these interposed clauses. God so loved the world that

everybody will go to heaven'--that is the gospel of a great many of

you; and it is the gospel of a great many wise and learned people. But

it is not John's Gospel, and it is not Christ's Gospel. The beginning

and the end of the text cannot be buckled up together in that

rough-and-ready fashion. They have to be linked by a chain; and there

are two links in the chain: God forges the one, and we have to forge

the other. God so loved the world that He gave'--then He has done His

work. That whosoever believeth'--that is your work. And it is in vain

that God forges His link, unless you will forge yours and link it up to

His. God so loved the world,' that is step number one in the process;

that He gave,' that is step number two; and then there comes another

that'--that whosoever believeth,' that is step number three; and they

are all needed before you come to number four, which is the

landing-place and not a step--should not perish, but have everlasting

life.'

III. The pitcher.

I come to what I called the pitcher, with which we draw the water for

our own use--that whosoever believeth.' You perhaps say, Yes, I

believe. I accept every word of the Gospel, I quite believe that Jesus

Christ died, as a matter of history; and I quite believe that He died

for men's sins.' And what then? Is that what Jesus Christ meant by

believing? To believe about Him is not to believe on Him; and unless

you believe on Him you will get no good out of Him. There is the lake,

and the river must flow past the shanties in the clearing in the

forest, if the men there are to drink. But it may flow past their

doors, as broad as the Mississippi, and as deep as the ocean; but they

will perish with thirst, unless they dip in their hands, like Gideon's

men, and carry the water to their own lips. Dear friend, what you have

to do--and your soul's salvation, and your peace and joy and nobleness

in this life and in the next depend absolutely upon it--is simply to

trust in Jesus Christ and His death for your sins.

I sometimes wish we had never heard that word faith.' For as soon as we

begin to talk about faith,' people begin to think that we are away up

in some theological region far above everyday life. Suppose we try to

bring it down a little nearer to our businesses and bosoms, and instead

of using a word that is kept sacred for employment in religious

matters, and saying faith,' we say trust.' That is what you give to

your wives and husbands, is it not? And that is exactly what you have

to give to Jesus Christ, simply to lay hold of Him as a man lays hold

of the heart that loves him, and leans his whole weight upon it. Lean

hard on Him, hang on Him, or, to take the other metaphor that is one of

the Old Testament words for trust, flee for refuge' to Him. Fancy a man

with the avenger of blood at his back, and the point of the pursuer's

spear almost pricking his spine--don't you think he would make for the

City of Refuge with some speed? That is what you have to do. He that

believeth, and by trust lays hold of the Hand that holds him up, will

never fall; and he that does not lay hold of that Hand will never

stand, to say nothing of rising. And so by these two links God's love

of the world is connected with the salvation of the world.

IV. The draught.

Finally, we have here the draught of living water. Did you ever think

why our text puts should not perish' first? Is it not because, unless

we put our trust in Him, we shall certainly perish, and because,

therefore, that certainty of perishing must be averted before we can

have everlasting life'?

Now I am not going to enlarge on these two solemn expressions,

perishing' and everlasting life.' I only say this: men do not need to

wait until they die before they perish.' There are men and women here

now who are dead--dead while they live, and when they come to die, the

perishing, which is condemnation and ruin, will only be the making

visible, in another condition of life, of what is the fact to-day. Dear

brethren, you do not need to die in order to perish in your sins, and,

blessed be God, you can have everlasting life before you die. You can

have it now, and there is only one way to have it, and that is to lay

hold of Him who is the Life. And when you have Jesus Christ in your

heart, whom you will be sure to have if you trust Him, then you will

have life--life eternal, here and now, and death will only make

manifest the eternal life which you had while you were alive here, and

will perfect it in fashions that we do not yet know anything about.

Only remember, as I have been trying to show you, the order that runs

through this text. Remember the order of these last words, and that we

must first of all be delivered from eternal and utter death, before we

can be invested with the eternal and absolute life.

Now, dear brethren, I dare say I have never spoken to the great

majority of you before; it is quite possible I may never speak to any

of you again. I have asked God to help me to speak so as that souls

should be drawn to the Saviour. And I beseech you now, as my last word,

that you would listen, not to me, but to Him. For it is He that says to

us, God so loved the world, that He gave His Son, that

whosoever'--whosoever,' a blank cheque, like the M. or N. of the

Prayer-book, or the A. B. of a schedule; you can put your own name in

it--that whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish, but have'--here,

now--everlasting life.'

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THE WEARIED CHRIST

Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well.

. . . He said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.'--JOHN

iv. 6, 32.

Two pictures result from these two verses, each striking in itself, and

gaining additional emphasis by the contrast. It was during a long hot

day's march that the tired band of pedestrians turned into the fertile

valley. There, whilst the disciples went into the little hill-village

to purchase, if they could, some food from the despised inhabitants,

Jesus, apparently too exhausted to accompany them, sat thus on the

well.' That little word thus seems to have a force difficult to

reproduce in English. It is apparently intended to enhance the idea of

utter weariness, either because the word wearied' is in thought to be

supplied, sat, being thus wearied, on the well'; or because it conveys

the notion which might be expressed by our just as He was'; as a tired

man flings Himself down anywhere and anyhow, without any kind of

preparation beforehand, and not much caring where it is that he rests.

Thus, utterly worn out, Jesus Christ sits on the well, whilst the

western sun lengthens out the shadows on the plain. The disciples come

back, and what a change they find. Hunger gone, exhaustion ended, fresh

vigour in their wearied Master. What had made the difference? The

woman's repentance and joy. And He unveils the secret of His

reinvigoration when He says, I have meat to eat that ye know not

of'--the hidden manna. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me,

and to finish His work.'

Now, I think if we take just three points of view, we shall gain the

lessons of this remarkable contrast. Note, then, the wearied Christ;

the devoted Christ; the reinvigorated Christ.

I. The wearied Christ.

How precious it is to us that this Gospel, which has the loftiest

things to say about the manifest divinity of our Lord, and the glory

that dwelt in Him, is always careful to emphasise also the manifest

limitations and weaknesses of the Manhood. John never forgets either

term of his great sentence in which all the gospel is condensed, the

Word became flesh.' Ever he shows us the Word'; ever the flesh.' Thus

it is he only who records the saying on the Cross, I thirst.' It is he

who tells us how Jesus Christ, not merely for the sake of getting a

convenient opening of a conversation, or to conciliate prejudices, but

because He needed what He asked, said to the woman of Samaria, Give Me

to drink.' So the weariness of the Master stands forth for us as

pathetic proof that it was no shadowy investiture with an apparent

Manhood to which He stooped, but a real participation in our

limitations and weaknesses, so that work to Him was fatigue, even

though in Him dwelt the manifest glory of that divine nature which

fainteth not, neither is weary.'

Not only does this pathetic incident teach us for our firmer faith, and

more sympathetic and closer apprehension, the reality of the Manhood of

Jesus Christ, but it supplies likewise some imperfect measure of His

love, and reveals to us one condition of His power. Ah! if He had not

Himself known weariness He never could have said, Come unto Me, all ye

that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' It was

because Himself took our infirmities,' and amongst these the weakness

of tired muscles and exhausted frame, that He giveth power to the

faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.' The

Creator must have no share in the infirmities of the creature. It must

be His unwearied power that calls them all by their names; and because

He is great in might not one' of the creatures of His hand can fail.'

But the Redeemer must participate in that from which He redeems; and

the condition of His strength being made perfect in our weakness' is

that our weakness shall have cast a shadow upon the glory of His

strength. The measure of His love is seen in that, long before Calvary,

He entered into the humiliation and sufferings and sorrows of humanity;

a condition of His power is seen in that, forasmuch as the children

were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part

of the same,' not only that through death He might deliver' from death,

but that in life He might redeem from the ills and sorrows of life.

Nor does that exhausted Figure, reclining on Jacob's Well, preach to us

only what He was. It proclaims to us likewise what we should be. For if

His work was carried on to the edge of His capacity, and if He shrank

not from service because it involved toil, what about the professing

followers of Jesus Christ, who think that they are exempted from any

form of service because they can plead that it will weary them? What

about those who say that they tread in His footsteps, and have never

known what it was to yield up one comfort, one moment of leisure, one

thrill of enjoyment, or to encounter one sacrifice, one act of

self-denial, one aching of weariness for the sake of the Lord who bore

all for them? The wearied Christ proclaims His manhood, proclaims His

divinity and His love, and rebukes us who consent to walk in the way of

His commandments' only on condition that it can be done without dust or

heat; and who are ready to run the race that is set before us, only if

we can come to the goal without perspiration or turning a hair. Jesus,

being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well.'

II. Still further, notice here the devoted Christ.

It is not often that He lets us have a glimpse into the innermost

chambers of His heart, in so far as the impelling motives of His course

are concerned. But here He lays them bare. My meat is to do the will of

Him that sent Me, and to finish His work.'

Now, it is no mere piece of grammatical pedantry when I ask you to

notice that the language of the original is so constructed as to give

prominence to the idea that the aim of Christ's life was the doing of

the Father's will; and that it is the aim rather than the actual

performance and realisation of the aim which is pointed at by our Lord.

The words would be literally rendered My meat is that I may do the will

of Him that sent Me and finish His work'--that is to say, the very

nourishment and refreshment of Christ was found in making the

accomplishment of the Father's commandment His ever-impelling motive,

His ever-pursued goal. The expression carries us into the inmost heart

of Jesus, dealing, as it does, with the one all-pervading motive rather

than with the resulting actions, fair and holy as these were.

Brethren, the secret of our lives, if they are at all to be worthy and

noble, must be the same--the recognition, not only as they say now,

that we have a mission, but that there is a Sender; which is a wholly

different view of our position, and that He who sends is the loving

Father, who has spoken to us in that dear Son, who Himself made it His

aim thus to obey, in order that it might be possible for us to re-echo

His voice, and to repeat His aim. The recognition of the Sender, the

absolute submission of our wills to His, must run through all the life.

You may do your daily work, whatever it be, with this for its motto,

the will of the Lord be done'; and they who thus can look at their

trade, or profession, and see the trivialities and monotonies of their

daily occupations, in the transfiguring light of that great thought,

will never need to complain that life is small, ignoble, wearisome,

insignificant. As with pebbles in some clear brook with the sunshine on

it, the water in which they are sunk glorifies and magnifies them. If

you lift them out, they are but bits of dull stone; lying beneath the

sunlit ripples they are jewels. Plunge the prose of your life, and all

its trivialities, into that great stream, and it will magnify and

glorify the smallest and the homeliest. Absolute submission to the

divine will, and the ever-present thrilling consciousness of doing it,

were the secret of Christ's life, and ought to be the secret of ours.

Note the distinction between doing the will and perfecting the work.

That implies that Jesus Christ, like us, reached forward, in each

successive act of obedience to the successive manifestations of the

Father's will, to something still undone. The work will never be

perfected or finished except on condition of continual fulfilment,

moment by moment, of the separate behests of that divine will. For the

Lord, as for His servants, this was the manner of obedience, that He

pressed towards the mark,' and by individual acts of conformity secured

that at last the whole work' should have been so completely

accomplished that He might be able to say upon the Cross, It is

finished.' If we have any right to call ourselves His, we too have thus

to live.

III. Lastly, notice the reinvigorated Christ.

I have already pointed out the lovely contrast between the two

pictures, the beginning and the end of this incident; so I need not

dwell upon that. The disciples wondered when they found that Christ

desired and needed none of the homely sustenance that they had brought

to Him. And when He answered their sympathy rather than their

curiosity--for they did not ask Him any questions, but they said to

Him, Master, eat'--with I have meat to eat that ye know not of,' they,

in their blind, blundering fashion, could only imagine that some one

had brought Him something. So they gave occasion for the great words

upon which we have been touching.

Notice, however, that Christ here sets forth the lofty aim at

conformity to the divine will and fulfilment of the divine Work as

being the meat of the soul. It is the true food for us all. The spirit

which feeds upon such food will grow and be nourished. And the soul

which feeds upon its own will and fancies, and not upon the plain brown

bread of obedience, which is wholesome, though it be often bitter, will

feed upon ashes, which will grate upon the teeth and hurt the palate.

Such a soul will be like those wretched infants that are discovered

sometimes at baby-farms,' starved and stunted, and not grown to half

their right size. If you would have your spirits strong, robust, well

nourished, live by obedience, and let the will of God be the food of

your souls, and all will be well.

Souls thus fed can do without a good deal that others need. Why,

enthusiasm for anything lifts a man above physical necessities and

lower desires, even in its poorest forms. A regiment of soldiers making

a forced march, or an athlete trying to break the record, will tramp,

tramp on, not needing food, or rest, or sleep, until they have achieved

their purpose, poor and ignoble though it may be. In all regions of

life, enthusiasm and lofty aims make the soul lord of the body and of

the world.

And in the Christian life we shall be thus lords, exactly in proportion

to the depth and earnestness of our desires to do the will of God. They

who thus are fed can afford to scorn delights and live laborious days.'

They who thus are fed can afford to do with plain living, if there be

high impulses as well as high thinking. And sure I am that nothing is

more certain to stamp out the enthusiasm of obedience which ought to

mark the Christian life than the luxurious fashion of living which is

getting so common to-day amongst professing Christians.

It is not in vain that we read the old story about the Jewish boys

whose faces were radiant and whose flesh was firmer when they were fed

on pulse and water than on all the wine and dainties of the Babylonish

court. Set a knife to thy throat if thou be a man given to appetite,'

and let us remember that the less we use, and the less we feel that we

need, of outward goods, the nearer do we approach to the condition in

which holy desires and lofty aims will visit our spirits.

I commend to you, brethren, the story of our text, in its most literal

application, as well as in the loftier spiritual lessons that may be

drawn from it. To be near Christ, and to desire to live for Him,

delivers us from dependence upon earthly things; and in those who thus

do live the old word shall be fulfilled, Better is a little that a

righteous man hath, than the abundance of many wicked.'

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GIVE ME TO DRINK'

. . . Jesus saith unto her, Give Me to drink . . . . Jesus saith unto

her, I that speak unto thee am He.'--JOHN iv. 7, 26.

This Evangelist very significantly sets side by side our Lord's

conversations with Nicodemus and with the woman of Samaria. The persons

are very different: the one a learned Rabbi of reputation, influence,

and large theological knowledge of the then fashionable kind; the other

an alien woman, poor--for she had to do this menial task of

water-drawing in the heat of the day--and of questionable character.

The diversity of persons necessitates great differences in the form of

our Lord's address to each; but the resemblances are as striking as the

divergencies. In both we have His method of gradually unveiling the

truth to a susceptible soul, beginning with symbol and a hint,

gradually enlarging the hint and translating the symbol; and finally

unveiling Himself as the Giver and the Gift. There is another

resemblance; in both the characteristic gift is that of the Spirit of

Life, and, perhaps, in both the symbol is the same. For we read in one

of water and the Spirit'; and in the other of the fountain within,

springing into everlasting life. However that may be, the process of

teaching is all but identical in substance in both cases, though in

form so various.

The words of our Lord which I have taken for our text now are His first

and last utterance in this conversation. What a gulf lies between! They

are linked together by the intervening sayings, and constitute with

these a great ladder, of which the foot is fast on earth, and the top

fixed in heaven. On the one hand, He owns the lowest necessities; on

the other, He makes the highest claims. Let us ponder on this

remarkable juxtaposition, and try to gather the lessons that are plain

in it.

I. First, then, I think we see here the mystery of the dependent

Christ.

Give Me to drink': I am He.' Try to see the thing for a moment with the

woman's eyes. She comes down from her little village, up amongst the

cliffs on the hillside, across the narrow, hot valley, beneath the

sweltering sunshine reflected from the bounding mountains, and she

finds, in the midst of the lush vegetation round the ancient well, a

solitary, weary Jew, travel-worn, evidently exhausted--for His

disciples had gone away to buy food, and He was too wearied to go with

them--looking into the well, but having no dipper or vessel by which to

get any of its cool treasure. We lose a great deal of the meaning of

Christ's request if we suppose that it was merely a way of getting into

conversation with the woman, a breaking of the ice.' It was a great

deal more than that. It was the utterance of a felt and painful

necessity, which He Himself could not supply without a breach of what

He conceived to be His filial dependence. He could have brought water

out of the well. He did not need to depend upon the pitcher that the

disciples had perhaps unthinkingly carried away with them when they

went to buy bread. He did not need to ask the woman to give, but He

chose to do so. We lose much if we do not see in this incident far more

than the woman saw, but we lose still more if we do not see what she

did see. And the words which the Master spoke to her are no mere way of

introducing a conversation on religious themes; but He asked for a

draught which He needed, and which He had no other way of getting.

So, then, here stands, pathetically set forth before us, our Lord's

true participation in two of the distinguishing characteristics of our

weak humanity--subjection to physical necessities and dependence on

kindly help. We find Him weary, hungry, thirsty, sometimes slumbering.

And all these instances are documents and proofs for us that He was a

true man like ourselves, and that, like ourselves, He depended on the

woman that ministered to Him' for the supply of His necessities, and so

knew the limitations of our social and else helpless humanity.

But then a wearied and thirsty man is nothing of much importance. But

here is a Man who humbled Himself to be weary and to thirst. The

keynote of this Gospel, the one thought which unlocks all its

treasures, and to the elucidation of which, in all its aspects, the

whole book is devoted, is, The Word was made flesh.' Only when you let

in the light of the last utterance of our text, I that speak unto thee

am He,' do we understand the pathos, the sublimity, the depth and

blessedness of meaning which lie in the first one, Give Me to drink.'

When we see that He bowed Himself, and willingly stretched out His

hands for the fetters, we come to understand the significance of these

traces of His manhood. The woman says, with wonder, How is it that

Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me?' and that was wonderful. But, as

He hints to her, if she had known more clearly who this Person was,

that seemed to be a Jew, a deeper wonder would have crept over her

spirit. The wonder is that the Eternal Word should need the water of

the well, and should ask it of a poor human creature.

And why this humiliation? He could, as I have said, have wrought a

miracle. He that fed five thousand, He that had turned water into wine

at the rustic marriage-feast, would have had no difficulty in quenching

His thirst if he had chosen to use His miraculous power therefore. But

He here shows us that the true filial spirit will rather die than cast

off its dependence on the Father, and the same motive which led Him to

reject the temptation in the wilderness, and to answer with sublime

confidence, Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word from

the mouth of God,' forbids Him here to use other means of securing the

draught that He so needed than the appeal to the sympathy of an alien,

and the swift compassion of a woman's heart.

And then, let us remember that the motive of this willing acceptance of

the limitations and weaknesses of humanity is, in the deepest analysis,

simply His love to us; as the mediaeval hymn has it, Seeking me, Thou

satest weary.'

In that lonely Traveller, worn, exhausted, thirsty, craving for a

draught of water from a stranger's hand, is set forth the glory of the

Father, full of grace and truth.' A strange manifestation of divine

glory this! But if we understand that the glory of God is the lustrous

light of His self-revealing love, perhaps we shall understand how, from

that faint, craving voice, Give Me to drink,' that glory sounds forth

more than in the thunders that rolled about the rocky peak of Sinai.

Strange to think, brethren, that the voice from those lips dry with

thirst, which was low and weak, was the voice that spoke to the sea,

Peace! be still,' and there was a calm; that said to demons, Come out

of him!' and they evacuated their fortress; that cast its command into

the grave of Lazarus, and he came forth; and which one day all that are

in the grave shall hear, and hearing shall obey. Give Me to drink.' I

that speak unto thee am He.'

II. Secondly, we may note here the self-revealing Christ.

The process by which Jesus gradually unveils His full character to this

woman, so unspiritual and unsusceptible as she appeared at first sight

to be, is interesting and instructive. It would occupy too much of your

time for me to do more than set it before you in the barest outline.

Noting the singular divergence between the two sayings which I have

taken as our text, it is interesting to notice how the one gradually

merges into the other. First of all, Jesus Christ, as it were, opens a

finger of His hand to let the woman have a glimpse of the gift lying

there, that that may kindle desire, and hints at some occult depth in

His person and nature all undreamed of by her yet, and which would be

the occasion of greater wonder, and of a reversal of their parts, if

she knew it. Then, in answer to her, half understanding that He meant

more than met the ear, and yet opposing the plain physical difficulties

that were in the way, in that He had nothing to draw with, and the well

is deep,' and asking whether He were greater than our father Jacob, who

also had given, and given not only a draught, but the well, our Lord

enlarges her vision of the blessedness of the gift, though He says but

little more of its nature, except in so far as that may be gathered

from the fact that the water that He will give will be a permanent

source of satisfaction, forbidding the pangs of unquenched desire ever

again to be felt as pangs; and from the other fact that it will be an

inward possession, leaping up with a fountain's energy, and a life

within itself, towards, and into everlasting life. Next, he strongly

assails conscience and demands repentance, and reveals Himself as the

reader of the secrets of the heart. Then He discloses the great truths

of spiritual worship. And, finally, as a prince in disguise might do,

He flings aside the mantle of which He had let a fold or two be blown

back in the previous conversation, and stands confessed. I that speak

unto thee am He.' That is to say, the kindling of desire, the proffer

of the all-satisfying gift, the quickening of conscience, the

revelation of a Father to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and the

final full disclosure of His person and office as the Giver of the gift

which shall slake all the thirsts of men--these are the stages of His

self-revelation.

Then note, not only the process, but the substance of the revelation of

Himself. The woman had a far more spiritual and lofty conception of the

office of Messiah than the Jews had. It is not the first time that

heretics have reached a loftier ideal of some parts of the truth than

the orthodox attain. To the Jew the Messiah was a conquering king, who

would help them to ride on the necks of their enemies, and pay back

their persecutions and oppressions. To this Samaritan woman--speaking,

I suppose, the conceptions of her race--the Messiah was One who was to

tell us all things.'

Jesus Christ accepts the position, endorses her anticipations, and in

effect presents Himself before her and before us as the Fountain of all

certitude and knowledge in regard to spiritual matters. For all that we

can know, or need to know, with regard to God and man and their mutual

relations; for all that we can or need know in regard to manhood, its

ideal, its obligations, its possibilities, its destinies; for all that

we need to know of men in their relation to one another, we have to

turn to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who will tell us all things.' He is

the Fountain of light; He is the Foundation of certitude; and they who

seek, not hypotheses and possibilities and conjectures and dreams, but

the solid substance of a reliable knowledge, must grasp Him, and esteem

the words of His mouth and the deeds of His life more than their

necessary food.

He meets this woman's conceptions as He had met those of Nicodemus. To

him He had unveiled Himself as the Son of God, and the Son of Man who

came down from heaven, and is in heaven, and ascends to heaven. To the

woman He reveals Himself as the Messiah, who will tell us all truth,

and to both as the Giver of the gift which shall communicate and

sustain and refresh the better life. But I cannot help dwelling for a

moment upon the remarkable, beautiful, and significant designation

which our Lord employs here. I that speak unto thee.' The word in the

original, translated by our version speak,' is even more sweet, because

more familiar, and conveys the idea of unrestrained frank intercourse.

Perhaps we might render I who am talking with Thee!' and that our Lord

desired to emphasise to the woman's heart the notion of His familiar

intercourse with her, Messiah though He were, seems to me confirmed by

the fact that He uses the same expression, with additional grace and

tenderness about it, when He says, with such depth of meaning, to the

blind man whom He had healed, Thou hast both seen Him,' with the eyes

to which He gave sight and object of sight, and it is He that talketh

with thee.' The familiar Christ who will come and speak to us face to

face and heart to heart, as a man speaketh with his friend,' is the

Christ who will tell us all things, and whom we may wholly trust.

Note too how this revelation has for its condition the docile

acceptance of the earlier and imperfect teachings. If the woman had not

yielded herself to our Lord's earlier words, and, though with very dim

insight, yet with a heart that sought to be taught, followed Him as He

stepped from round to round of the ascending ladder, she had never

stood on the top and seen this great vision. If you see nothing more in

Jesus Christ than a man like yourself, compassed with our infirmities,

and yet sweet and gracious and good and pure, be true to what you know,

and put it into practice, and be ready to accept all the light that

dawns. They that begin down at the bottom with hearing Give me to

drink,' may stand at the top, and hear Him speak to them His unveiled

truth and His full glory. To him that hath shall be given.' If any man

wills to do His will he shall know of the teaching.'

III. Lastly, we have here the universal Christ.

The woman wondered that, being a Jew, He spoke to her. As I have said,

our Lord's first utterance is simply the expression of a real physical

necessity. But it is none the less what the woman felt it to be, a

strange overleaping of barriers that towered very high. A Samaritan, a

woman, a sinner, is the recipient of the first clear confession from

Jesus Christ of His Messiahship and dignity. She was right in her

instinct that something lay behind His sweeping aside of the barriers

and coming so close to her with His request. These two, the prejudices

of race and the contempt for woman, two of the crying evils of the old

world, were overpassed by our Lord as if He never saw them. They were

too high for men's puny limbs; they made no obstacle to the march of

His divine compassion. And therein lies a symbol, if you like, but none

the less a prophecy that will be fulfilled, of the universal adaptation

and destination of the Gospel, and its independence of all distinctions

of race and sex, condition, moral character. In Jesus Christ there is

neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, neither bond nor free'; ye are

all one in Christ.' If He had been but a Jew, it was wonderful that He

should talk to a Samaritan. But there is nothing in the character and

life of Christ, as recorded in Scripture, more remarkable and more

plain than the entire absence of any racial peculiarities, or of

characteristics owing to His position in space or time. So unlike His

nation was He that the very elite of His nation snarled at Him and

said, Thou art a Samaritan!' So unlike them was He that one feels that

a character so palpitatingly human to its core, and so impossible to

explain from its surroundings, is inexplicable, but on the New

Testament theory that He is not a Jew, or man only, but the Son of Man,

the divine embodiment of the ideal of humanity, whose dwelling was on

earth, but His origin and home in the bosom of God. Therefore Jesus

Christ is the world's Christ, your Christ, my Christ, every man's

Christ, the Tree of Life that stands in the midst of the garden, that

all men may draw near to it and gather of its fruit.

Brother, answer His proffer of the gift as this woman did: Sir, give me

this water, that I thirst not; neither go all the way to the world's

broken cisterns to draw'; and He will put into your hearts that

indwelling fountain of life, so that you may say like this woman's

townspeople: Now I have heard Him myself, and know that this is indeed

the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

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THE GIFT AND THE GIVER

Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and

who it is that saith unto thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have

asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.'--JOHN iv. 10.

This Gospel has two characteristics seldom found together: deep thought

and vivid character-drawing. Nothing can be more clear-cut and dramatic

than the scene in the chapter before us. There is not a word of

description of this Samaritan woman. She paints herself, and it is not

a beautiful picture. She is apparently of the peasant class, from a

little village nestling on the hill above the plain, come down in the

broiling sunshine to Jacob's well. She is of mature age, and has had a

not altogether reputable past. She is frivolous, ready to talk with

strangers, with a tongue quick to turn grave things into jests; and yet

she possesses, hidden beneath masses of unclean vanities, a conscience

and a yearning for something better than she has, which Christ's words

awoke, and which was finally so enkindled as to make her fit to receive

the full declaration of His Messiahship, which Pharisees and priests

could not be trusted with.

I need scarcely do more than remind you of the way in which the

conversation between this strangely assorted pair began. The solitary

Jew, sitting spent with travel on the well, asks for a draught of

water; not in order to get an opening for preaching, but because He

needs it. She replies with an exclamation of light wonder, half a jest

and half a sarcasm, and challenging a response in the same tone.

But Christ lifts her to a higher level by the words of my text, which

awed levity, and prepared for a fuller revelation. Thou dost wonder

that I, being a Jew, ask drink of thee, a Samaritan. If thou knewest

who I am, thy wonder at My asking would be more. If thou knewest what I

have to give, we should change places, and thou wouldest ask, and I

should bestow.'

So then, we have here gift, Giver, way of getting, and ignorance that

hinders asking. Let us look at these.

I. First, the gift of God. Now it is quite clear that our Lord means

the same thing, whatever it may be, by the two expressions, the gift of

God' and the living water.' For, unless He does, the whole sequence of

my text falls to pieces. Living water' was suggested, no doubt, by the

circumstances of the moment. There, in the well, was an ever-springing

source, and, says He, a like supply, ever welling up for thirsty lips

and foul hands, ever sweet and ever sufficient, God is ready to give.

We may remember how, all through Scripture, we hear the tinkle of these

waters as they run. The force of the expression is to be gathered

largely from the Old Testament and the uses of the metaphor there. It

has been supposed that by the living water' which God gives is here

meant some one specific gift, such as that of the Holy Spirit, which

sometimes is expressed by the metaphor. Rather I should be disposed to

say the living water' is eternal life. With Thee is the fountain of

life.' And so, in the last resort, the gift of God is God Himself.

Nothing else will suffice for us, brethren. We need Him, and we need

none but Him.

Our Lord, in the subsequent part of this conversation, again touches

upon this great metaphor, and suggests one or two characteristics,

blessings, and excellences of it. It shall be in him,' it is something

that we may carry about with us in our hearts, inseparable from our

being, free from all possibility of being filched away by violence,

being rent from us by sorrows, or even being parted from us by death.

What a man has outside of him he only seems to have. Our only real

possessions are those which have passed into the substance of our

souls. All else we shall leave behind. The only good is inward good;

and this water of life slakes our thirst because it flows into the

deepest place of our being, and abides there for ever.

Oh! you that are seeking your satisfaction from fountains that remain

outside of you after all your efforts, learn that all of them, by

reason of their externality, will sooner or later be broken cisterns

that can hold no water.' And I beseech you, if you want rest for your

souls and stilling for their yearnings, look for it there, where only

it can be found, in Him, who not only dwells in the heavens to rule and

to shower down blessings, but enters into the waiting heart and abides

there, the inward, and therefore the only real, possession and riches.

It shall be in him a fountain of water.'

It is springing up'--with an immortal energy, with ever fresh fulness,

by its own inherent power, needing no pumps nor machinery, but ever

welling forth its refreshment, an emblem of the joyous energy and

continual freshness of vitality, which is granted to those who carry

God in their hearts, and therefore can never be depressed beyond

measure, nor ever feel that the burden of life is too heavy to bear, or

its sorrows too sharp to endure.

It springs up into eternal life,' for water must seek its source, and

rise to the level of its origin, and this fountain within a man, that

reaches up ever towards the eternal life from which it came, and which

it gives to its possessor, will bear him up, as some strong spring will

lift the clods that choked its mouth, will bear him up towards the

eternal life which is native to it, and therefore native to him.

Brethren, no man is so poor, so low, so narrow in capacity, so limited

in heart and head, but that he needs a whole God to make him restful.

Nothing else will. To seek for satisfaction elsewhere is like sailors

who in their desperation, when the water-tanks are empty, slake their

thirst with the treacherous blue that washes cruelly along the battered

sides of their ship. A moment's alleviation is followed by the

recurrence, in tenfold intensity, of the pangs of thirst, and by

madness, and death. Do not drink the salt water that flashes and rolls

by your side when you can have recourse to the fountain of life that is

with God.

Oh!' you say, commonplace, threadbare pulpit rhetoric.' Yes! Do you

live as if it were true? It will never be too threadbare to be dinned

into your head until it has passed into your lives and regulated them.

II. Now, in the next place, notice the Giver.

Jesus Christ blends in one sentence, startling in its boldness, the

gift of God, and Himself as the Bestower. This Man, exhausted for want

of a draught of water, speaks with parched lips a claim most singularly

in contrast with the request which He had just made: I will give thee

the living water.' No wonder that the woman was bewildered, and could

only say, The well is deep, and Thou hast nothing to draw with.' She

might have said, Why then dost Thou ask me?' The words were meant to

create astonishment, in order that the astonishment might awaken

interest, which would lead to the capacity for further illumination.

Suppose you had been there, had seen the Man whom she saw, had heard

the two things that she heard, and knew no more about Him than she

knew, what would you have thought of Him and His words? Perhaps you

would have been more contemptuous than she was. See to it that, since

you know so much that explains and warrants them, you do not treat them

worse than she did.

Jesus Christ claims to give God's gifts. He is able to give to that

poor, frivolous, impure-hearted and impure-lifed woman, at her request,

the eternal life which shall still all the thirst of her soul, that had

often in the past been satiated and disgusted, but had never been

satisfied by any of its draughts.

And He claims that in this giving He is something more than a channel,

because, says He, If thou hadst asked of Me I would give thee.' We

sometimes think of the relation between God and Christ as being

typified by that of some land-locked sea amidst remote mountains, and

the affluent that brings its sparkling treasures to the thirsting

valley. But Jesus Christ is no mere vehicle for the conveyance of a

divine gift, but His own heart, His own power, His own love are in it;

and it is His gift just as much as it is God's.

Now I do not do more than pause for one moment to ask you to think of

what inference is necessarily involved in such a claim as this. If we

know anything about Jesus Christ at all, we know that He spoke in this

tone, not occasionally, but habitually. It will not do to pick out

other bits of His character or actions and admire these and ignore the

characteristic of His teachings--His claims for Himself. And I have

only this one word to say, if Jesus Christ ever said anything the least

like the words of my text, and if they were not true, what was He but a

fanatic who had lost His head in the fancy of His inspiration? And if

He said these words and they were true, what is He then? What but that

which this Gospel insists from its beginning to its end that He

was--the Eternal Word of God, by whom all divine revelation from the

beginning has been made, and who at last became flesh' that we might

receive of His fulness,' and therein be filled with all the fulness of

God.' Other alternative I, for my part, see none.

But I would have you notice, too, the connection between these human

needs of the Saviour and His power to give the divine gift. Why did He

not simply say to this woman, If thou knewest who I am?' Why did He use

this periphrasis of my text, Who it is that saith unto thee, "Give Me

to drink"'? Why but because He wanted to fix her attention on the

startling contradiction between His appearance and His claims--on the

one hand asserting divine prerogative, on the other forcing into

prominence human weakness and necessity, because these two things, the

human weakness and the divine prerogative, are inseparably braided

together and intertwined. Some of you will remember the great scene in

Shakespeare where the weakness of Caesar is urged as a reason for

rejecting his imperial authority:--

Ay! and that tongue of his, that bade the Romans Mark him, and write

his speeches in their books, Alas! it cried, "Give me some drink, . . .

Like a sick girl."'

And the inference that is drawn is, how can he be fit to be a ruler of

men? But we listen to our Caesar and Emperor, when He asks this woman

for water, and when He says on the Cross, I thirst,' and we feel that

these are not the least of His titles to be crowned with many crowns.

They bring Him nearer to us, and they are the means by which His love

reaches its end, of bestowing upon us all, if we will have it, the cup

of salvation. Unless He had said the one of these two things, He never

could have said the other. Unless the dry lips had petitioned, Give Me

to drink,' the gracious lips could never have said, I will give thee

living water.' Unless, like Jacob of old, this Shepherd could say, In

the day the drought consumed Me,' it would have been impossible that

the flock shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more,

. . . for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall lead them

to living fountains of water.'

III. Again, notice how to get the gift.

Christ puts together, as if they were all but contemporaneous, thou

wouldst have asked of Me,' and I would have given thee.' The hand on

the telegraph transmits the message, and back, swift as the lightning,

flashes the response. The condition, the only condition, and the

indispensable condition, of possessing that water of life--the summary

expression for all the gifts of God in Jesus Christ, which at the last

are essentially God Himself--is the desire to possess it turned to

Jesus Christ. Is it not strange that men should not desire; is it not

strange and sad that such foolish creatures are we that we do not want

what we need; that our wishes and needs are often diametrically

opposite? All men desire happiness, but some of us have so vitiated our

tastes and our palates by fiery intoxicants that the water of life

seems dreadfully tasteless and unstimulating, and so we will rather go

back again to the delusive, poisoned drinks than glue our lips to the

river of God's pleasures.

But it is not enough that there should be the desire. It must be turned

to Him. In fact the asking of my text, so far as you and I are

concerned, is but another way of speaking the great keyword of personal

religion, faith in Jesus Christ. For they who ask, know their

necessity, are convinced of the power of Him to whom they appeal to

grant their requests, and rely upon His love to do so. And these three

things, the sense of need, the conviction of Christ's ability to save

and to satisfy, and of His infinite love that desires to make us

blessed--these three things fused together make the faith which

receives the gift of God.

Remember, brethren, that another of the scriptural expressions for the

act of trusting in Him, is taking, not asking. You do not need to ask,

as if for something that is not provided. What we all need to do is to

open our eyes to see what is there. If we like to put out our hands and

take it. Why should we be saying, Give me to drink,' when a pierced

hand reaches out to us the cup of salvation, and says, Drink ye all of

it'? Ho, every one that thirsteth, come . . . and drink . . . without

money and without price.'

There is no other condition but desire turned to Christ, and that is

the necessary condition. God cannot give men salvation, as veterinary

surgeons drench unwilling horses--forcing the medicine down their

throats through clenched teeth. There must be the opened mouth, and

wherever there is, there will be the full supply. Ask, and ye shall

receive'; take, and ye shall possess.

IV. Lastly, mark the ignorance that prevents asking.

Jesus Christ looked at this poor woman and discerned in her, though, as

I said, it was hidden beneath mountains of folly and sin, a thirsty

soul that was dimly longing for something better. And He believed that,

if once the mystery of His being and the mercy of God's gifts were

displayed before her, she would melt into a yearning of desire that is

certain to be fulfilled. In some measure the same thing is true of us

all. For surely, surely, if only you saw realities, and things as they

are, some of you would not be content to continue as you are--without

this water of life. Blind, blind, blind, are the men who grope at

noon-day as in the dark and turn away from Jesus. If you knew, not with

the head only, but with the whole nature, if you knew the thirst of

your soul, the sweetness of the water, the readiness of the Giver, and

the dry and parched land to which you condemn yourselves by your

refusal, surely you would bethink yourself and fall at His feet and

ask, and get, the water of life.

But, brethren, there is a worse case than ignorance; there is the case

of people that know and refuse, not by reason of imperfect knowledge,

but by reason of averted will. And I beseech you to ponder whether that

may not be your condition. Whosoever will, let him come.' Ye will not

come unto Me that ye might have life.' I do not think I venture much

when I say that I am sure there are people hearing me now, not

Christians, who are as certain, deep down in their hearts, that the

only rest of the soul is in God, and the only way to get it is through

Christ, as any saint of God's ever was. But the knowledge does not

touch their will because they like the poison and they do not want the

life.

Oh! dear friends, the instantaneousness of Christ's answer, and the

certainty of it, are as true for each of us as they were for this

woman. The offer is made to us all, just as it was to her. We can

gather round that Rock like the Israelites in the wilderness, and slake

every thirst of our souls from its outgushing streams. Jesus Christ

says to each of us, as He did to her, tenderly, warningly, invitingly,

and yet rebukingly, If thou knewest . . . thou wouldst ask, . . . and I

would give.'

Take care lest, by continual neglect, you force Him at last to change

His words, and to lament over you, as He did over the city that He

loved so well, and yet destroyed. If thou hadst known in thy day the

things that belong to thy peace. But now they are hid from thine eyes.'

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THE SPRINGING FOUNTAIN

The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water,

springing up into everlasting life.'--JOHN iv. 14.

There are two kinds of wells, one a simple reservoir, another

containing the waters of a spring. It is the latter kind which is

spoken about here, as is clear not only from the meaning of the word in

the Greek, but also from the description of it as springing up.' That

suggests at once the activity of a fountain. A fountain is the emblem

of motion, not of rest. Its motion is derived from itself, not imparted

to it from without. Its silvery column' rises ever heavenward, though

gravitation is too strong for it, and drags it back again.

So Christ promises to this ignorant, sinful Samaritan woman that if she

chose He would plant in her soul a gift which would thus well up, by

its own inherent energy, and fill her spirit with music, and

refreshment, and satisfaction.

What is that gift? The answer may be put in various ways which really

all come to one. It is Himself, the unspeakable Gift, His own greatest

gift; or it is the Spirit which they that believe on Him should

receive,' and whereby He comes and dwells in men's hearts; or it is the

resulting life, kindred with the life bestowed, a consequence of the

indwelling Christ and the present Spirit.

And so the promise is that they who believe in Him and rest upon His

love shall receive into their spirits a new life principle which shall

rise in their hearts like a fountain, springing up into everlasting

life.'

I think we shall best get the whole depth and magnitude of this great

promise if, throwing aside all mere artificial order, we simply take

the words as they stand here in the text, and think, first, of Christ's

gift as a fountain within; then as a fountain springing, leaping up, by

its own power; and then as a fountain springing into everlasting life.'

I. First, Christ's gift is represented here as a fountain within.

Most men draw their supplies from without; they are rich, happy,

strong, only when externals minister to them strength, happiness,

riches. For the most of us, what we have is that which determines our

felicity.

Take the lowest type of life, for instance, the men of whom the

majority, alas! I suppose, in every time is composed, who live

altogether on the low plane of the world, and for the world alone,

whether their worldliness take the form of sensuous appetite, or of

desire to acquire wealth and outward possessions. The thirst of the

body is the type of the experience of all such people. It is satisfied

and slaked for a moment, and then back comes the tyrannous appetite

again. And, alas! the things that you drink to satisfy the thirst of

your souls are too often like a publican's adulterated beer, which has

got salt in it, and chemicals, and all sorts of things to stir up,

instead of slaking and quenching, the thirst. So he that loveth silver

shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with

increase.' The appetite grows by what it feeds on, and a little lust

yielded to to-day is a bigger one to-morrow, and half a glass to-day

grows to a bottle in a twelvemonth. As the old classical saying has it,

he who begins by carrying a calf, before long is able to carry an ox';

so the thirst in the soul needs and drinks down a constantly increasing

draught.

And even if we rise up into a higher region and look at the experience

of the men who have in some measure learned that a man's life

consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth,' nor

in the abundance of the gratification that his animal nature gets, but

that there must be an inward spring of satisfaction, if there is to be

any satisfaction at all; if we take men who live for thought, and

truth, and mental culture, and yield themselves up to the enthusiasm

for some great cause, and are proud of saying, My mind to me a kingdom

is,' though they present a far higher style of life than the former,

yet even that higher type of man has so many of his roots in the

external world that he is at the mercy of chances and changes, and he,

too, has deep in his heart a thirst that nothing, no truth, no wisdom,

no culture, nothing that addresses itself to one part of his nature,

though it be the noblest and the loftiest, can ever satisfy and slake.

I am sure I have some such people in my audience, and to them this

message comes. You may have, if you will, in your own hearts, a

springing fountain of delight and of blessedness which will secure that

no unsatisfied desires shall ever torment you. Christ in His fulness,

His Spirit, the life that flows from both and is planted within our

hearts, these are offered to us all; and if we have them we carry

inclosed within ourselves all that is essential to our felicity; and we

can say, I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be

self-satisfying,' not with the proud, stoical independence of a man who

does not want either God or man to make him blessed, but with the

humble independence of a man who can say my sufficiency is of God.'

No independence of externals is possible, nor wholesome if it were

possible, except that which comes from absolute dependence on Jesus

Christ.

If you have Christ in your heart then life is possible, peace is

possible, joy is possible, under all circumstances and in all places.

Everything which the soul can desire, it possesses. You will be like

the garrison of a beleaguered castle, in the courtyard of which is a

sparkling spring, fed from some source high up in the mountains, and

finding its way in there by underground channels which no besiegers can

ever touch. Sorrows will come, and make you sad, but though there may

be much darkness round about you, there will be light in the darkness.

The trees may be bare and leafless, but the sap has gone down to the

roots. The world may be all wintry and white with snow, but there will

be a bright little fire burning on your own hearthstone. You will carry

within yourselves all the essentials to blessedness. If you have Christ

in the vessel' you can smile at the storm. They that drink from earth's

fountains shall thirst again'; but they who have Christ in their hearts

will have a fountain within which will not freeze in the bitterest

cold, nor fail in the fiercest heat. The water that I shall give him

shall be in him a fountain.'

II. Christ's gift is a springing fountain.

The emblem, of course, suggests motion by its own inherent impulse.

Water may be stagnant, or it may yield to the force of gravity and

slide down a descending river-bed, or it may be pumped up and lifted by

external force applied to it, or it may roll as it does in the sea,

drawn by the moon, driven by the winds, borne along by currents that

owe their origin to outward heat or cold. But a fountain rises by an

energy implanted within itself, and is the very emblem of joyous, free,

self-dependent and self-regulated activity.

And so, says Christ, The water that I shall give him shall be in him a

springing fountain'; it shall not lie there stagnant, but leap like a

living thing, up into the sunshine, and flash there, turned into

diamonds, when the bright rays smile upon it.

So here is the promise of two things: the promise of activity, and of

an activity which is its own law.

The promise of activity. There seems small blessing, in this overworked

world, in a promise of more active exertion; but what an immense part

of our nature lies dormant and torpid if we are not Christians! How

much of the work that is done is dreary, wearisome, collar-work,

against the grain. Do not the wheels of life often go slowly? Are you

not often weary of the inexpressible monotony and fatigue? And do you

not go to your work sometimes, though with a fierce feeling of

need-to-do-it,' yet also with inward repugnance? And are there not

great parts of your nature that have never woke into activity at all,

and are ill at ease, because there is no field of action provided for

them? The mind is like millstones; if you do not put the wheat into

them to grind, they will grind each other's faces. So some of us are

fretting ourselves to pieces, or are sick of a vague disease, and are

morbid and miserable because the highest and noblest parts of our

nature have never been brought into exercise. Surely this promise of

Christ's should come as a true Gospel to such, offering, as it does, if

we will trust ourselves to Him, a springing fountain of activity in our

hearts that shall fill our whole being with joyous energy, and make it

a delight to live and to work. It will bring to us new powers, new

motives; it will set all the wheels of life going at double speed. We

shall be quickened by the presence of that mighty power, even as a dim

taper is brightened and flames up when plunged into a jar of oxygen.

And life will be delightsome in its hardest toil, when it is toil for

the sake of, and by the indwelling strength of, that great Lord and

Master of our work.

And there is not only a promise of activity here, but of activity which

is its own law and impulse. That is a blessed promise in two ways. In

the first place, law will be changed into delight. We shall not be

driven by a commandment standing over us with whip and lash, or coming

behind us with spur and goad, but that which we ought to do we shall

rejoice to do; and inclination and duty will coincide in all our lives

when our life is Christ's life in us.

That should be a blessing to some of you who have been fighting against

evil and trying to do right with more or less success, more or less

interruptedly and at intervals, and have felt the effort to be a burden

and a wearisomeness. Here is a promise of emancipation from all that

constraint and yoke of bondage which duty discerned and unloved ever

lays upon a man's shoulders. When we carry within us the gift of a life

drawn from Jesus Christ, and are able to say like Him, Lo, I come to do

Thy will, and Thy law is within my heart,' only then shall we have

peace and joy in our lives. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ

Jesus makes us free from the law of sin and death.'

And then, in the second place, that same thought of an activity which

is its own impulse and its own law, suggests another aspect of this

blessedness, namely, that it sets us free from the tyranny of external

circumstances which absolutely shape the lives of so many of us. The

lives of all must be to a large extent moulded by these, but they need

not, and should not be completely determined by them. It is a miserable

thing to see men and women driven before the wind like thistledown.

Circumstances must influence us, but they may either influence us to

base compliance and passive reception of their stamp, or to brave

resistance and sturdy nonconformity to their solicitations. So used,

they will influence us to a firmer possession of the good which is most

opposite to them, and we shall be the more unlike our surroundings, the

more they abound in evil. You can make your choice whether, if I may so

say, you shall be like balloons that are at the mercy of the gale and

can only shape their course according as it comes upon them and blows

them along, or like steamers that have an inward power that enables

them to keep their course from whatever point the wind blows, or like

some sharply built sailing-ship that, with a strong hand at the helm,

and canvas rightly set, can sail almost in the teeth of the wind and

compel it to bear her along in all but the opposite direction to that

in which it would carry her if she lay like a log on the water.

I beseech you all, and especially you young people, not to let the

world take and shape you, like a bit of soft clay put into a

brick-mould, but to lay a masterful hand upon it, and compel it to help

you, by God's grace, to be nobler, and truer, and purer.

It is a shame for men to live the lives that so many amongst us live,

as completely at the mercy of externals to determine the direction of

their lives as the long weeds in a stream that yield to the flow of the

current. It is of no use to preach high and brave maxims, telling men

to assert their lordship over externals, unless we can tell them how to

find the inward power that will enable them to do so. But we can preach

such noble exhortations to some purpose when we can point to the great

gift which Christ is ready to give, and exhort them to open their

hearts to receive that indwelling power which shall make them free from

the dominion of these tyrant circumstances and emancipate them into the

liberty of the sons of God.' The water that I shall give him shall be

in him a leaping fountain.'

III. The last point here is that Christ's gift is a fountain springing

up into everlasting life.'

The water of a fountain rises by its own impulse, but howsoever its

silver column may climb it always falls back into its marble basin. But

this fountain rises higher, and at each successive jet higher, tending

towards, and finally touching, its goal, which is at the same time its

course. The water seeks its own level, and the fountain climbs until it

reaches Him from whom it comes, and the eternal life in which He lives.

We might put that thought in two ways. First, the gift is eternal in

its duration. The water with which the world quenches its thirst

perishes. All supplies and resources dry up like winter torrents in

summer heat. All created good is but for a time. As for some, it

perishes in the use; as for other, it evaporates and passes away, or is

as water spilt upon the ground which cannot be gathered up'; as for

all, we have to leave it behind when we go hence. But this gift springs

into everlasting life, and when we go it goes with us. The Christian

character is identical in both worlds, and however the forms and

details of pursuits may vary, the essential principle remains one. So

that the life of a Christian man on earth and his life in heaven are

but one stream, as it were, which may, indeed, like some of those

American rivers, run for a time through a deep, dark canyon, or in an

underground passage, but comes out at the further end into broader,

brighter plains and summer lands; where it flows with a quieter current

and with the sunshine reflected on its untroubled surface, into the

calm ocean. He has one gift and one life for earth and heaven--Christ

and His Spirit, and the life that is consequent upon both.

And then the other side of this great thought is that the gift tends

to, is directed towards, or aims at and reaches, everlasting life. The

whole of the Christian experience on earth is a prophecy and an

anticipation of heaven. The whole of the Christian experience of earth

evidently aims towards that as its goal, and is interpreted by that as

its end. What a contrast that is to the low and transient aims which so

many of us have! The lives of many men go creeping along the surface

when they might spring heavenwards. My friend! which is it to be with

you? Is your life to be like one of those Northern Asiatic rivers that

loses itself in the sands, or that flows into, or is sluggishly lost

in, a bog; or is it going to tumble over a great precipice, and fall

sounding away down into the blackness; or is it going to leap up into

everlasting life'? Which of the two aims is the wiser, is the nobler,

is the better?

And a life that thus springs will reach what it springs towards. A

fountain rises and falls, for the law of gravity takes it down; this

fountain rises and reaches, for the law of pressure takes it up, and

the water rises to the level of its source. Christ's gift mocks no man,

it sets in motion no hopes that it does not fulfil; it stimulates to no

work that it does not crown with success. If you desire a life that

reaches its goal, a life in which all your desires are satisfied, a

life that is full of joyous energy, that of a free man emancipated from

circumstances and from the tyranny of unwelcome law, and victorious

over externals, open your hearts to the gift that Christ offers you;

the gift of Himself, of His death and passion, of His sacrifice and

atonement, of His indwelling and sanctifying Spirit.

He offered all the fulness of that grace to this Samaritan woman, in

her ignorance, in her profligacy, in her flippancy. He offers it to

you. His offer awoke an echo in her heart, will it kindle any response

in yours? Oh! when He says to you, The water that I shall give will be

in you a fountain springing into everlasting life,' I pray you to

answer as she did--Sir!--Lord--give me this water, that I thirst not;

neither come to earth's broken cisterns to draw.'

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THE SECOND MIRACLE

This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when He was come out

of Judaea into Galilee.'--JOHN iv. 54.

The Evangelist evidently intends us to connect together the two

miracles in Cana. His object may, possibly, be mainly chronological,

and to mark the epochs in our Lord's ministry. But we cannot fail to

see how remarkably these two miracles are contrasted. The one takes

place at a wedding, a homely scene of rural festivity and gladness. But

life has deeper things in it than gladness, and a Saviour who preferred

the house of feasting to the house of mourning would be no Saviour for

us. The second miracle, then, turns to the darker side of human

experience. The happiest home has its saddened hours; the truest

marriage joy has associated with it many a care and many an anxiety.

Therefore, He who began by breathing blessing over wedded joy goes on

to answer the piteous pleading of parental anxiety. It was fitting that

the first miracle should deal with gladness, for that is God's purpose

for His creatures, and that the second should deal with sicknesses and

sorrows, which are additions to that purpose made needful by sin.

Again, the first miracle was wrought without intercession, as the

outcome of Christ's own determination that His hour for working it was

come. The second miracle was drawn from Him by the imperfect faith and

the agonising pleading of the father.

But the great peculiarity of this second miracle in Cana is that it is

moulded throughout so as to develop and perfect a weak faith. Notice

how there are three words in the narrative, each of which indicates a

stage in the history. Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not

believe.' . . . The man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto

him, and he went his way.' . . . Himself believed and his whole house.'

We have here, then, Christ manifested as the Discerner, the Rebuker,

the Answerer, and therefore the Strengthener, of a very insufficient

and ignorant faith. It is a lovely example of the truth of that ancient

prophecy, He will not quench the smoking flax.' So these three stages,

as it seems to me, are the three points to observe. We have, first of

all, Christ lamenting over an imperfect faith. Then we have Him

testing, and so strengthening, a growing faith. And then we have the

absent Christ rewarding and crowning a tested faith. I think if we look

at these three stages in the story we shall get the main points which

the Evangelist intends us to observe.

I. First, then, we have here our Lord lamenting over an ignorant and

sensuous faith.

At first sight His words, in response to the hurried, eager appeal of

the father, seem to be strangely unfeeling, far away from the matter in

hand. Think of how breathlessly, feeling that not an instant is to be

lost, the poor man casts himself at the Master's feet, and pleads that

his boy is at the point of death.' And just think how, like a dash of

cold water upon this hot impatience, must have come these strange words

that seem to overleap his case altogether, and to be gazing beyond

him--Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe.' What has

that to do with me and my dying boy, and my impatient agony of

petition?' It has everything to do with you.'

It is the revelation, first of all, of Christ's singular calmness and

majestic leisure, which befitted Him who needed not to hurry, because

He was conscious of absolute power. As when the pleading message was

sent to Him: He whom Thou lovest is sick, He abode still two days in

the same place where He was'; because He loved Lazarus and Martha and

Mary; and just as when Jairus is hurrying Him to the bed where his

child lies dead, He pauses on the way to attend to the petition of

another sufferer; so, in like calmness of majestic leisure, He here

puts aside the apparently pressing and urgent necessity in order to

deal with a far deeper, more pressing one.

For in the words there is not only a revelation of our Lord's majestic

leisure, but there is also an indication of what He thought of most

importance in His dealing with men. It was worthy of His care to heal

the boy; it was far more needful that He should train and lead the

father to faith. The one can wait much better than the other.

And there is in the words, too, something like a sigh of profound

sorrow. Christ is not so much rebuking as lamenting. It is His own

pained heart that speaks; He sees in the man before Him more than the

man's words indicated; reading his heart with that divine omniscience

which pierces beyond the surface, and beholding in him the very same

evil which affected all his countrymen. So He speaks to him as one of a

class, and thus somewhat softens the rebuke even while the answer to

the nobleman's petition seems thereby to become still less direct, and

His own sorrowful gaze at the wide-reaching spirit of blindness seems

thereby to become more absorbed and less conscious of the individual

sufferer kneeling at His feet.

Christ had just come from Samaria, the scorn of the Jews, and there He

had found people who needed no miracles, whose conception of the

Messiah was not that of a mere wonder-worker, but of one who will tell

us all things,' and who believed on Him not because of the portents

which He wrought, but because they heard Him themselves, and His words

touched their consciences and stirred strange longings in their hearts.

On the other hand, this Evangelist has carefully pointed out in the

preceding chapters how such recognition as Christ had thus far received

in His own country' had been entirely owing to His miracles, and had

been therefore regarded by Christ Himself as quite unreliable (chap.

ii. 23-25), while even Nicodemus, the Pharisee, had seen no better

reason for regarding Him as a divinely sent Teacher than these miracles

that Thou doest.' And now here He is no sooner across the border again

than the same spirit meets Him. He hears it even in the pleading,

tearful tones of the father's voice, and that so clearly that it is for

a moment more prominent even to His pity than the agony and the prayer.

And over that Christ sorrows. Why? Because, to their own impoverishing,

the nobleman and his fellows were blind to all the beauty of His

character. The graciousness of His nature was nothing to them. They had

no eyes for His tenderness and no ears for His wisdom; but if some

vulgar sign had been wrought before them, then they would have run

after Him with their worthless faith. And that struck a painful chord

in Christ's heart when He thought of how all the lavishing of His love,

all the grace and truth which shone radiant and lambent in His life,

fell upon blind eyes, incapable of beholding His beauty; and of how the

manifest revelation of a Godlike character had no power to do what

could be done by a mere outward wonder.

This is not to disparage the miraculous evidence.' It is only to put in

its proper place the spirit, which was blind to the self-attesting

glory of His character, which beheld it and did not recognise it as the

glory of the Only Begotten of the Father.'

That very same blindness to the divine which is in Jesus Christ,

because material things alone occupy the heart and appeal to the mind,

is still the disease of humanity. It still drives a knife into the

loving heart of the pitying and helpful Christ. The special form which

it takes in such a story as this before us is long since gone. The

sense-bound people of this generation do not ask for signs. Miracles

are rather a hindrance than a help to the reception of Christianity in

many quarters. People are more willing to admire, after a fashion, the

beauty of Christ's character, and the exalted purity of His teaching

(meaning thereby, generally, the parts of it which are not exclusively

His), than to accept His miracles. So far round has the turn in the

wheel gone in these days.

But although the form is entirely different the spirit still remains.

Are there not plenty of us to whom sense is the only certitude? We

think that the only knowledge is the knowledge that comes to us from

that which we can see and touch and handle, and the inferences that we

may draw from these; and to many all that world of thought and beauty,

all those divine manifestations of tenderness and grace, are but mist

and cloudland. Intellectually, though in a somewhat modified sense,

this generation has to take the rebuke: Except ye see, ye will not

believe.'

And practically do not the great mass of men regard the material world

as all-important, and work done or progress achieved there as alone

deserving the name of work' or progress,' while all the glories of a

loving Christ are dim and unreal to their sense-bound eyes? Is it not

true to-day, as it was in the old time, that if a man would come among

you, and bring you material good, that would be the prophet for you?

True wisdom, beauty, elevating thoughts, divine revelations; all these

go over your heads. But when a man comes and multiplies loaves, then

you say, This is of a truth the prophet that should come into the

world.' Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.'

And on the other side, is it not sadly true about those of us who have

the purest and the loftiest faith, that we feel often as if it was very

hard, almost impossible, to keep firm our grasp of One who never is

manifested to our sense? Do we not often feel, O that I could for once,

for once only, hear a voice that would speak to my outward ear, or see

some movement of a divine hand'? The loftiest faith still leans

towards, and has an hankering after, some external and visible

manifestation, and we need to subject ourselves to the illuminating

rebuke of the Master who says, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will

not believe,' and, therefore, your faith that craves the support of

some outward thing, and often painfully feels that it is feeble without

it, is as yet but very imperfect and rudimentary.

II. And so we have here, as the next stage of the narrative, our Lord

testing, and thus strengthening, a growing faith.

The nobleman's answer to our Lord's strange words sounds, at first

sight, as if these had passed over him, producing no effect at all.

Sir, come down ere my child die'; it is almost as if he had said, Do

not talk to me about these things at present. Come and heal my boy.

That is what I want; and we will speak of other matters some other

time.' But it is not exactly that. Clearly enough, at all events, he

did not read in Christ's words a reluctance to yield to his request,

still less a refusal of it. Clearly he did not misunderstand the sad

rebuke which they conveyed, else he would not have ventured to

reiterate his petition. He does not pretend to anything more than he

has, he does not seek to disclaim the condemnation that Christ brings

against him, nor to assume that he has a loftier degree or a purer kind

of faith than he possesses. He holds fast by so much of Christ's

character as he can apprehend; and that is the beginning of all

progress. What he knows he knows. He has sore need; that is something.

He has come to the Helper; that is more. He is only groping after Him,

but he will not say a word beyond what he knows and feels; and,

therefore, there is something in him to work upon; and faith is already

beginning to bud and blossom. And so his prayer is his best answer to

Christ's word: Sir, come down ere my child die.'

Ah! dear brethren, any true man who has ever truly gone to Christ with

a sense even of some outward and temporal need, and has ever really

prayed at all, has often to pass through this experience, that the

first result of his agonising cry shall be only the revelation to him

of the unworthiness and imperfection of his own faith, and that there

shall seem to be strange delay in the coming of the blessing so longed

for. And the true attitude for a man to take when there is unveiled

before him, in his consciousness, in answer to his cry for help, the

startling revelation of his own unworthiness and imperfection--the true

answer to such dealing is simply to reiterate the cry. And then the

Master bends to the petition, and because He sees that the second

prayer has in it less of sensuousness than the first, and that some

little germ of a higher faith is beginning to open, He yields, and yet

He does not yield. Sir, come down ere my child die.' Jesus saith unto

him, Go thy way, thy son liveth.'

Why did He not go with the suppliant? Why, in the act of granting, does

He refuse? For the suppliant's sake. The whole force and beauty of the

story come out yet more vividly if we take the contrast between it and

the other narrative, which presents some points of similarity with

it--that of the healing of the centurion's servant at Capernaum. There

the centurion prays that Christ would but speak, and Christ says, I

will come.' There the centurion does not feel that His presence is

necessary, but that His word is enough. Here the nobleman says Come,'

because it has never entered his mind that Christ can do anything

unless He stands like a doctor by the boy's bed. And he says, too,

Come, ere my child die,' because it has never entered his mind that

Christ can do anything if his boy has once passed the dark threshold.

And because his faith is thus feeble, Christ refuses its request,

because He knows that so to refuse is to strengthen. Asked but to

speak' by a strong faith, He rewards it by more than it prays, and

offers to come.' Asked to come' by a weak faith, He rewards it by less,

which yet is more, than it had requested; and refuses to come, that He

may heal at a distance; and thus manifests still more wondrously His

power and His grace.

His gentle and wise treatment is telling; and he who was so sense-bound

that unless he saw signs and wonders he would not believe,' turns and

goes away, bearing the blessing, as he trusts, in his hands, while yet

there is no sign whatever that he has received it.

Think of what a change had passed upon that man in the few moments of

his contact with Christ. When he ran to His feet, all hot and

breathless and impatient, with his eager plea, he sought only for the

deliverance of his boy, and sought it at the moment, and cared for

nothing else. When he goes away from Him, a little while afterwards, he

has risen to this height, that he believes the bare word, and turns his

back upon the Healer, and sets his face to Capernaum in the confidence

that he possesses the unseen gift. So has his faith grown.

And that is what you and I have to do. We have Christ's bare word, and

no more, to trust to for everything. We must be content to go out of

the presence-chamber of the King with only His promise, and to cleave

to that. A feeble faith requires the support of something sensuous and

visible, as some poor trailing plant needs a prop round which it may

twist its tendrils. A stronger faith strides away from the Master,

happy and peaceful in its assured possession of a blessing for which it

has nothing to rely upon but a simple bare word. That is the faith that

we have to exercise. Christ has spoken. That was enough for this man,

who from the babyhood of Christian experience sprang at once to its

maturity. Is it enough for you? Are you content to say, Thy word, Thy

naked word, is all that I need, for Thou hast spoken, and Thou wilt do

it'?

Go thy way; thy son liveth.' What a test! Suppose the father had not

gone his way, would his son have lived? No! The son's life and the

father's reception from Christ of what he asked were suspended upon

that one moment. Will he trust Him, or will he not? Will he linger, or

will he depart? He departs, and in the act of trusting he gets the

blessing, and his boy is saved.

And look how the narrative hints to us of the perfect confidence of the

father now. Cana was only a few miles from Capernaum. The road from the

little city upon the hill down to where the waters of the lake flashed

in the sunshine by the quays of Capernaum was only a matter of a few

hours; but it was the next day, and well on into the next day, before

he met the servants that came to him with the news of his boy's

recovery. So sure was he that his petition was answered that he did not

hurry to return home, but leisurely and quietly went onwards the next

day to his child. Think of the difference between the breathless rush

up to Cana, and the quiet return from it. He that believeth shall not

make haste.'

III. And so, lastly, we have here the absent Christ crowning and

rewarding the faith which has been tested.

We have the picture of the father's return. The servants meet him.

Their message, which they deliver before he has time to speak, is

singularly a verbal repetition of the promise of the Master, Thy son

liveth.' His faith, though it be strong, has not yet reached to the

whole height of the blessing, for he inquires at what hour he began to

amend,' expecting some slow and gradual recovery; and he is told that

at the seventh hour,' the hour when the Master spoke, the fever left

him,' and all at once and completely was he cured. So, more than his

faith had expected is given to him; and Christ, when he lays His hand

upon a man, does His work thoroughly, though not always at once.

Why was the miracle wrought in that strange fashion? Why did our Lord

fling out His power as from a distance rather than go and stand at the

boy's bedside? We have already seen the reason in the peculiar

condition of the father's mind; but now notice what it was that he had

learned by such a method of healing, not only the fact of Christ's

healing power, but also the fact that the bare utterance of His will,

whether He were present or absent, had power. And so a loftier

conception of Christ would begin to dawn on him.

And for us that working of Christ at a distance is prophetic. It

represents to us His action to-day. Still He answers our cries that He

would come down to our help by sending forth from the city on the

hills, the city of the wedding feast, His healing power to descend upon

the sick-beds and the sorrows and the sins that afflict the villages

beneath. He sendeth forth His commandment upon earth, His word runneth

very swiftly.'

This new experience enlarged and confirmed the man's faith. The second

stage to which he had been led by Christ's treatment was simply belief

in our Lord's specific promise, an immense advance on his first

position of belief which needed sight as its basis.

But he had not yet come to the full belief of, and reliance upon, that

Healer recognised as Messiah. But the experience which he now has had,

though it be an experience based upon miracle, is the parent of a faith

which is not merely the child of wonder, nor the result of beholding an

outward sign. And so we read:--So the father knew that it was at the

same hour in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth. And himself

believed and his whole house.'

A partial faith brings experience which confirms and enlarges faith;

and they who dimly apprehend Him, and yet humbly love Him, and

imperfectly trust Him, will receive into their bosoms such large gifts

of His love and gracious Spirit that their faith will be strengthened,

and they will grow into the full stature of peaceful confidence.

The way to increase faith is to exercise faith. And the true parent of

perfect faith is the experience of the blessings that come from the

crudest, rudest, narrowest, blindest, feeblest faith that a man can

exercise. Trust Him as you can, do not be afraid of inadequate

conceptions, or of a feeble grasp. Trust Him as you can, and He will

give you so much more than you expected that you will trust Him more,

and be able to say: Now I believe, because I have heard Him myself, and

know that this is the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

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THE THIRD MIRACLE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.'--JOHN v. 8.

This third of the miracles recorded in John's Gospel finds a place

there, as it would appear, for two reasons: first, because it marks the

beginning of the angry unbelief on the part of the Jewish rulers, the

development of which it is one part of the purpose of this Gospel to

trace; second, because it is the occasion for that great utterance of

our Lord about His Sonship and His divine working as the Father also

works, which occupies the whole of the rest of the chapter, and is the

foundation of much which follows in the Gospel. It is for these

reasons, and not for the mere sake of adding another story of a

miraculous cure to the many which the other Evangelists have given us,

that John narrates for us this history.

If, then, we consider the reason for the introduction of the miracle

into the Gospel, we may be saved from the necessity of dwelling, except

very lightly, upon some of the preliminary details which preceded the

actual cure. It does not matter much to us for our present purpose

which Feast it was on which Jesus went up to Jerusalem, nor whether the

pool was by the sheep-market or by the sheep-gate, nor whereabouts in

Jerusalem Bethesda might happen to be. It may be of importance for us

to notice that the mention of the angel who appears in the fourth verse

is not a part of the original narrative. The true text only tells us of

an intermittent pool which possessed, or was supposed to possess,

curative energy; and round which the kindness of some forgotten

benefactor had built five rude porches. There lay a crowd of wasted

forms, and pale, sorrowful faces, with all varieties of pain and

emaciation and impotence marked upon them, who yet were gathered in

Bethesda, which being interpreted means a house of mercy.' It is the

type of a world full of men suffering various sicknesses, but all sick;

the type of a world that gathers with an eagerness, not far removed

from despair, round anything that seems to promise, however vaguely, to

help and to heal; the type of a world, blessed be God, which, amidst

all its sad variety of woe and weariness, yet sits in the porches of a

house of mercy,' and has in the midst a fountain opened for sin and for

uncleanness,' whose energy is as mighty for the last comer of all the

generations as for the first that stepped into its cleansing flood.

This poor man, sick and impotent for eight and thirty years--many of

which he had spent, as it would appear, day by day, wearily dragging

his paralysed limbs to the fountain with daily diminishing hope--this

poor man attracts the regard of Christ when He enters, and He puts to

him the strange question, Wilt thou be made whole?' Surely there was no

need to ask that; but no doubt the many disappointments and the long

years of waiting and of suffering had stamped apathy upon the

sufferer's face, and Christ saw that the first thing that was needed,

in order that His healing power might have a point of contact in the

man's nature, was to kindle some little flicker of hope in him once

more.

And so, no doubt, with a smile on His face, which converted the

question into an offer, He says: Wilt thou be made whole?' meaning

thereby to say, I will heal thee if thou wilt.' And there comes the

weary answer, as if the man had said: Will I be made whole? What have I

been lying here all these years for? I have nobody to put me into the

pool.'

Yes, it is a hopeful prospect to hold out to a man whose disease is

inability to walk, that if he will walk to the water he will get cured,

and be able to walk afterwards. Why, he could not even roll himself

into the pond, and so there he had lain, a type of the hopeless efforts

at self-healing which we sick men put forth, a type of the tantalising

gospels which the world preaches to its subjects when it says to a

paralysed man: Walk that you may be healed; keep the commandments that

you may enter into life.'

And so we have come at last to the main point of the narrative before

us, and I fix upon these words, the actual words in which the cure was

conveyed, as communicating to us some very important lessons and

thoughts about Christ and our relation to Him.

I. First, I see in them Christ manifesting Himself as the Giver of

power to the powerless who trust Him.

His words may seem at first hearing to partake of the very same almost

cruel irony as the condition of cure which had already proved

hopelessly impracticable. He, too, says, Walk that you may be cured';

and He says it to a paralysed and impotent man. But the two things are

very different, for before this cripple could attempt to drag his

impotent limbs into an upright position, and take up the little light

couch and sling it over his shoulders, he must have had some kind of

trust in the person that told him to do so. A very ignorant trust, no

doubt, it was; but all that was set before him about Jesus Christ he

grasped and rested upon. He only knew Him as a Healer, and he trusted

Him as such. The contents of a man's faith have nothing to do with the

reality of his faith; and he that, having only had the healing power of

Christ revealed to him, lays hold of that Healer, cleaves to Him with

as genuine a faith as the man who has the whole fulness and sublimity

of Christ's divine and human character and redeeming work laid out

before him, and who cleaves to these. The hand that grasps is one,

whatsoever be the thing that it grasps.

So it is no spiritualising of this story, or reading into it a deeper

and more religious meaning than belongs to it, to say that what passed

in that man's heart and mind before he caught up his little bed and

walked away with it, was essentially the same action of mind and heart

by which a sinful man, who knows that Christ is his Redeemer, grasps

His Cross and trusts his soul to Him. In the one case, as in the other,

there is confidence in the person; only in the one case the person was

only known as a Healer, and in the other the person is known as a

Saviour. But the faith is the same whatever it apprehends.

Christ comes and says to him, Rise, take up thy bed and walk.' There is

a movement of confidence in the man's heart; he tries to obey, and in

the act of obedience the power comes to him.

Ah, brother! it is always so. All Christ's commandments are gifts. When

He says to you, Do this!' He pledges Himself to give you power to do

it. Whatsoever He enjoins He strengthens for. He binds Himself, by His

commandments, and every word of His lips which says to us Thou shalt!'

contains as its kernel a word of His which says I will.' So when He

commands, He bestows; and we get the power to keep His commandments

when in humble faith we make the effort to do His will. It is only when

we try to obey for the love's sake of Him that has healed us that we

are able to obey. And be sure of this, whensoever we attempt to do what

we know to be the Master's will, because He has given Himself for us,

our power will be equal to our desire, and enough for our duty. As St.

Augustine says: Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt.'

Rise, take up thy bed and walk,' or as in another case, Stretch forth

thy hand.' And he stretched it forth, and his hand was restored whole

as the other.' Christ gives power to keep His commandments to the

impotent who try to obey, because they have been healed by Him.

II. In the next place, we have in this miracle our Lord set forth as

the absolute Master, because He is the Healer.

The Pharisees and their friends had no eyes for the miracle; but if

they found a man carrying his light couch on the Sabbath day, that was

a thing that excited their interest, and must be seen to immediately.

And so, paying no attention to the fact that it was a paralysed man who

was doing this, with the true narrow instinct of the formalist, they

lay hold only of the fact of the broken Rabbinical restrictions, and

try to stop him with these. It is the Sabbath day! It is not lawful for

thee to carry thy bed.'

And they get an answer which goes a great deal deeper than the speaker

knew, and puts the whole subject of Christian obedience on its right

footing. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto

me, Take up thy bed and walk.' As if he had said: He gave me the power,

had He not a right to tell me what to do with it? It was His gift that

I could lift my bed; was I not bound to walk when and where He that had

made me able to walk at all chose to bid me?'

And if you generalise that it just comes to this: the only person that

has a right to command you is the Christ who saves you. He has the

absolute authority to do as He will with your restored spiritual

powers, because He has bestowed them all upon you. His dominion is

built upon His benefits. He is the King because He is the Saviour. He

rules because He has redeemed. He begins with giving, and it is only

afterwards that He commands; and He turns to each of us with that smile

upon His lips, and with tenderness in His voice which will bind any

man, who is not an ingrate, to Him for ever. If ye love Me, keep My

commandments.'

There is always something hard and distasteful to the individual will

in the tone of authority assumed by any man whatsoever. We always more

or less rebel and shrink from that; and there is only one thing that

makes commandment sweet, and that is when it drops like honey from the

honeycomb, from lips that we love. So does it in the case of Christ's

commands to us. It is joy to know and to do the will of One to whom the

whole heart turns with gratitude and affection. And Christ blesses and

privileges us by the communication to us of His pleasure concerning us,

that we may have the gladness of yielding to His desires, and so

meeting the love which commands with the happy love which obeys. He

that made me whole, the same said unto me . . . ' and what He says it

must be joy to do.

So, My yoke is easy and My burden is light,' not because Christ

diminishes the requirements of law; not because the standard of

Christian obedience is lowered beneath any other standard of conduct

and character. It is far higher. The things which make Christian duty

are often very painful in themselves. There is always self-sacrifice in

Christian virtue, and self-sacrifice has always a sting in it; but the

yoke is easy and the burden is light,' because, if I may so say, the

yoke is padded with the softest velvet of love, and lies upon our necks

lightly because He has laid it there. All the rigid harshness of

precept is done away when the precept comes from Christ's lips, and His

commandment makes the crooked things straight and the rough places

plain'; and turns duty, distasteful duty, into joyful service. The

blessed basis of Christian obedience, and of Christ's authority, is

Christ's redemption.

III. And then, still further, we have here our Lord setting Himself

forth as the divine Son, whose working needs and knows no rest.

We find, in the subsequent part of the chapter, that the Jews,' as they

are called, by which is meant the antagonistic portion of the nation,

sought to slay Christ because He had done these things on the Sabbath

day.' But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.'

Unquestionably the form which the healing took was intended by our Lord

to bring into prominence the very point which these pedantic casuists

laid hold of. He meant to draw attention to His sweeping aside of the

Rabbinical casuistries of the law of the Sabbath. And He meant to do it

in order that He might have the occasion of making this mighty claim,

which is lodged in these solemn and profound words, to possess a

Sonship, which, like the divine working, wrought, needing and knowing

no repose.

My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' The rest, which the old story

in Genesis attributed to the Creator after the Creation, was not to be

construed as if it meant the rest of inactivity; but it was the rest of

continuous action. God's rest and God's work are one. Throughout all

the ages preservation is a continuous creation. The divine energy is

streaming out for evermore, as the bush that burns unconsumed, as the

sun that flames undiminished for ever, pouring out from the depth of

that divine nature, and for ever sustaining a universe. So that there

is no Sabbath, in the sense of a cessation from action, proper to the

divine nature; because all His action is repose, and e'en in His very

motion there is rest.' And this divine coincidence of activity and of

repose belongs to the divine Son in His divine-human nature. With that

arrogance which is the very audacity of blasphemy, if it be not the

simplicity of a divine consciousness, He puts His own work side by side

with the Father's work, as the same in principle, the same in method,

the same in purpose, the same in its majestic coincidence of repose and

of energy.

My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore for Me, as for Him,

there is no need of a Sabbath of repose.' Human activity is dissipated

by toil, human energy is exhausted by expenditure. Man works and is

weary; man works and is distracted. For the recovery of the serenity of

his spirit, and for the renewal of his physical strength, repose of

body and gathering in of mind, such as the Sabbath brought, were

needed; but neither is needed for Him who toils unwearied in the

heavens; and neither is needed for the divine nature of Him who labours

in labours parallel with the Father's here upon the earth.

Now remember that this is no abolition of the Sabbatic rest for

Christ's followers. Rather the ground on which He here asserts His

superiority over, and His non-dependence upon, such a repose shows, or

at all events implies, that all mere human workers need such rest, and

should thankfully accept it. But it is a claim on His part to a divine

equality. It is a claim on His part to do works which are other than

human works. It is a claim on His part to be the Lord of a divine

institution, living above the need of it, and able to mould it at His

will.

And so it opens up depths, into which we cannot go now, of the

relations of that divine Father and that divine Son; and makes us feel

that the little incident in which He turned to a paralysed man and

said: Rise, take up thy bed and walk,' on the Sabbath day, like some

small floating leaf of sea-weed upon the surface, has great deep

tendrils that go down and down into the very abyss of things, and lays

hold upon that central truth of Christianity, the divinity of the Son

of God, who is One with the ever-working Father.

IV. Lastly, we have in this incident yet another lesson. We have the

Healer who is also the Judge, warning the healed of the possibilities

of a relapse.

Jesus findeth him in the Temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art

made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.' The man's

eight-and-thirty years of illness had apparently been brought on by

dissipation. It was a sin of flesh, avenged in the flesh, that had

given him that miserable life. One would have thought he had got

warning enough, but we all know the old proverb about what happened

when the devil was ill, and what befell his resolutions when he got

better. And so Christ comes to him again with this solemn warning:

There is a worse thing than eight-and-thirty years of paralysis. You

fell once, and sore was your punishment. If you fall twice, your

punishment will be sorer.' Why? Because the first one had done him no

good. So here are lessons for us. There is always danger that we shall

fall back into old sins, even if we think we have overcome them. The

mystic influence of habit, enfeebled will, the familiar temptation, the

imagination rebelling, the memory tempting, sometimes even, as in the

case of a man that has been a drunkard, the physical effect of the

odour of his temptation upon his nostrils--all these things make it

extremely unlikely that a man who has once been under the condemnation

of any evil shall never be tempted to fall under its sway again.

And such a fall is not only more criminal than the former, it is more

deadly than the former. It were better for them not to have known the

way of righteousness, than after they have known it to turn aside.' The

last state of that man is worse than the first.'

My brother, there is no blacker condemnation; and if I may use a strong

word, there is no hotter hell, than that which belongs to an apostate

Christian. It has happened unto them according to the true proverb. The

dog is turned to his vomit again.' Very unpolite, a very coarse

metaphor? Yes; to express a far worse reality.

Christian men and women! you have been made whole. Sin no more, lest a

worse thing come unto you.' And turn to that Lord and say, Hold Thou me

up and I shall be saved.' Then the enemies will not be able to

recapture you, and the chains which have dropped from your wrists will

never enclose them any more.

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THE LIFE-GIVER AND JUDGE

But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. 18.

Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had

broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making

Himself equal with God. 19. Then answered Jesus and said unto them,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but

what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these

also doeth the Son likewise. 20. For the Father loveth the Son, and

sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth: and He will shew Him greater

works than these, that ye may marvel. 21. For as the Father raiseth up

the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom He will.

22. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto

the Son: 23. That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour

the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father

which hath sent Him. 24. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that

heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting

life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death

unto life. 25. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and

now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they

that hear shall live. 26. For as the Father hath life in Himself; so

hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; 27. And hath given

Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of

Man.'--JOHN v. 17-27.

The Jews' were up in arms because Jesus had delivered a man from

thirty-eight years of misery. They had no human sympathies for the

sufferer, whom hope deferred had made sick and hopeless, but they

shuddered at the breach of the Sabbath. Sacrifice' was more important

in their view than mercy.' They did not acknowledge that the miracle

proved Christ's Messiahship, but they were quite sure that doing it on

the Sabbath proved His wickedness. How formalism twists men's judgments

of the relative magnitude of form and spirit!

Jesus' vindication of His action roused them still farther, for He put

it on a ground which seemed to them nothing short of blasphemy: My

Father worketh even until now, and I work.' They fastened on one point

in that great saying, namely, that it claimed Sonship in a special

sense, and vindicated His right to disregard the Sabbath law on that

ground. God's rest is not inaction. Preservation is a continual

creation.' All being subsists because God is ever working. The Son

co-operates with the Father, and for Him, as for the Father, the

Sabbath law does not apply. The charge of breaking the Sabbath fades

into insignificance before the sin, in the objectors' eyes, of making

such claims. Therefore our Lord proceeds to expand and justify them.

He makes, first, a general statement in verses 19 and 20, in which He

sets forth the relation involved in the very idea of Fatherhood and

Sonship. He, as perfect Son of God, is perfectly one with the Father in

will and act, and so knit to Him in sympathy that a self-originated

action is impossible, not by reason of defect of power, but by reason

of unity of being. That perfect unity is expressed negatively (can do

nothing') and then positively (doeth likewise'). But it is not manifest

in actions alone, but has its deep roots in the perfect love which

flows ever from each to each, and in the Father's perfect communication

to the Son, and the Son's perfect reception from the Father. Jesus

claimed to stand in such a relation to the Father that He was able to

do whatsoever the Father did, and in like manner' as the Father did it;

that He was the unique object of the Father's love, and capable of

receiving complete communications as to all things that Himself doeth';

that He lived in such complete unity with the Father that His every act

was the result of it, and that no trace of self-will had ever tinged

His perfect spirit. What man has ever made such claims and not been

treated as insane? He makes them, and likewise says that He is lowly of

heart'; and the world listens, if not believing, at any rate reverent,

as in the presence of the best man that ever lived. Strange goodness,

to claim such divine prerogatives, unless the claim is valid!

It is expanded in verses 21-23 into two great classes of works, which

Jesus says that He does. Both are distinctively divine works. To give

life and to judge the world are equally beyond human power; they are

equally His actions. These are the greater works' which He foretells in

verse 20, and they are greater than the miracle of healing which had

originated the whole conversation. To give life at first, and to give

it again to the dead, and not only to revivify, but to raise them, are

plainly competent to no power short of the divine; and here Jesus

calmly claims them.

That tremendous claim is here made in the widest sense, including both

the corporeally and the spiritually dead, who are afterwards treated of

separately. The Son is the fountain of life in all the aspects of that

wide-reaching word; and He quickeneth whom He will,' as He had

spontaneously healed the impotent man. Does that assertion contradict

the other, just before it, that He does nothing of Himself? No; for His

will, while His, is ever harmonious with the Father's, just as His

love, which is ever coincident with the Father's. Does that assertion

imply His arbitrary pleasure, or make man's will a cipher? No; for His

will is guided by righteous love, and wills to quicken those who comply

with His conditions. But the assertion does declare that His will to

quicken is omnipotent, and that His voice can pierce the dull, cold ear

of death,' and bring back the soul to the empty house of this

tabernacle, or rouse the spirit dead in trespasses.'

The other divine prerogative of judging is inseparable from that of

revivifying, and in regard to it Christ's claim is still higher, for He

says that it is wholly vested in Him as Son. The idea of judgment here,

like that of quickening, with which it is associated, is to be taken in

its more general sense (all judgment') , and therefore as including

both the present judgment, for which Jesus said that He was come into

the world, and which men pass on themselves by the very fact of their

attitude to Him and His Gospel, and also the future final judgment,

which manifests character and determines destiny. Both these has the

Father given into the hands of the Son.

The purpose, so far as men are concerned, of the Son's investiture,

with these solemn prerogatives, is that He may receive universal divine

honour. A narrower purpose was stated in verse 20, where the persons

seeing His works are only His then audience, and the effect sought to

be produced is merely marvel.' But wonder is meant to lead on to

recognition of the meaning of His power, and of the mystery of His

person, and that, again, to rendering to Him precisely the same honour

as is due to the Father. No more unmistakable demand for worship, no

more emphatic assertion of divinity, can be made than lie in these

words. To worship Christ does not intercept the honour due to God; to

worship the Son is to worship the Father; and no man honours the Father

who sent Him who does not honour the Son whom He has sent.

In verses 24-27 the two related prerogatives are presented in their

spiritual aspect, while in the later verses of the chapter the

resurrection and quickening of the literally dead are dealt with. Mark

the significant new term introduced in verse 24, He that believeth.'

That spiritual resurrection from the death of sin and self is wrought

on whom He will,' but He wills that it shall be wrought on them who

believe. Similarly, in verse 25, it is they that hear' who shall live.'

It must be so, for there is no other way by which life from Him, who is

the Life, can pass into and quicken us than by our opening our hearts

by faith for its inflow. The mysteries of the Son's divinity and of His

imparted life are deep, but the condition of receiving that life is

plain. If we will trust Jesus, we shall live; if not, we are dead.

Trusting Him is trusting the Father that sent Him, and that Father

becomes accessible to our trust when we hear' Christ's word.'

The effects of faith are immediate, and the poor present may be

enriched and clothed in celestial light for each of us, if we will. For

Jesus does not point first to the mysteries of the resurrection of the

dead, and the tremendous solemnities of the final judgment, but to what

we may each enter upon at any moment. The believing man hath eternal

life,' and cometh not into judgment.' That life is not reserved to be

entered on in the blessed future, but is a present possession. True, it

will blossom into unexampled nobleness when it is transported into its

native country, like some exotic in our colder climates if it were

carried back to the tropics. But it is a present possession, and heaven

is not different in kind from the Christian life on earth, but differs

mainly in degree and in circumstances. And he that has the life here

and now is, by its moulding of his outward life, preserved from the

sins which would bring him into judgment, and the merciful judgment to

which he is still subject is that for which his truest self longs. And

that blessed condition carries in it the pledge that, at the last great

day, which is to others a day of wrath, a dreadful day,' he whom Christ

has quickened by His own indwelling life shall have boldness before

Him.'

Obviously, in these verses the present effects of faith are in view,

since Jesus emphatically declares that the hour now is' when they can

be realised. Once more He states in the strongest terms, and as the

reason for the assurance that faith secures to us life, His possession

of the two divine prerogatives of quickening and judging. What a

paradox it is to say that it is given' to Him to have life in Himself'!

And when was that gift given? In the depths of eternity.

He sits on no precarious throne, nor borrows leave to be,' and hence He

can impart life and lose none. Inseparably connected with that given,

and yet self-inherent, life, is the capacity for executing judgment

which belongs to Him as a Son of man.' It has been as the Son' of the

Father that it has been considered, in the previous verses, as

belonging to Him; but now it is as a true man that He is fitted to

bear, and actually is clothed with, that judicial power. No doubt He is

Judge of all, because by His incarnation and earthly life He presents

to all the offer of eternal life, by their attitude to which offer men

are judged. But the connection of thought seems rather to be that

Christ's Manhood, inextricably intertwined with His divinity, is

equally needed with the latter to constitute Him our Judge. He knoweth

our frame,' from the inside, as it were, and the participation in our

nature which fits Him to be a merciful and faithful High Priest' also

fits Him to be the Judge of mankind.

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THE FOURTH MIRACLE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

And Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed

to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and

likewise of the fishes as much as they would.'--JOHN vi. 11.

This narrative of the miraculous feeding of the five thousand is

introduced into John's Gospel with singular abruptness. We read in the

first verse of the chapter: After these things Jesus went over the Sea

of Galilee,' i.e. from the western to the eastern side. But the

Evangelist does not tell us how or when He got to the western side.

These things,' which are recorded in the previous chapter, are the

healing of the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda, the consequent

outburst of Jewish hostility, and the profound and solemn discourse of

our Lord, in which He claims filial relationship to the Father. So that

we must insert between the chapters a journey from Jerusalem to

Galilee, and a lapse at all events of some months--or, if the feast

referred to in the previous chapter be, as it may be, the Passover, an

interval of nearly a year. So little care for the mere framework of

events has this fourth Gospel; so entirely would the Evangelist have us

see that his reason for narrating this miracle is mainly its spiritual

lessons and the revelation which it makes of Christ as Himself the

Bread of Life.

Similarly, he has no care to tell us anything about the reasons for our

Lord's retirement with His disciples from Galilee to the eastern bank.

These we have to learn from the other Evangelists. They give us several

concurrent motives--the news of the death of John the Baptist; and of

the desire of the bloody tyrant to see Jesus, which foreboded evil;

also the return of the twelve Apostles from their trial journey, which

involved the necessity of rest for them; and, perhaps, the approach of

the Passover, which our Lord did not purpose to observe in Jerusalem

because of the Jewish hostility, and which, therefore, suggested the

withdrawal to temporary retirement.

All these reasons concurring, He and His disciples would seek for a

brief space of seclusion and repose. But the hope of securing such was

vain. The people followed in crowds so eagerly, so hastily, in such

enormous numbers, that no natural or ordinary provision for their wants

could be thought of. Hence the occasion for the miracle before us.

Now I think that this narrative, with which I wish to deal, falls

mainly into two portions, both of which suggest for us some important

lessons. There is, first, the preparations for the sign; and then there

is the sign itself. Let us look at these two points in succession.

I. First, then, the preparations for the sign.

Now it is to be observed that this is the only incident before our

Lord's last journey to Jerusalem which is recorded by all four

Evangelists; therefore the variations between the narratives are of

especial interest, and these variations are very considerable. We find,

for instance, that in John's account the question as to how the bread

was to be provided came from Christ; in the other Evangelists' accounts

that question is discussed first amongst the Apostles privately. We

find from John's narrative that the question was suggested even before

the multitudes had come to Jesus. We find in the Synoptic Gospels that

it arose at the close of a long day of teaching and of healing.

Now it is possible that this diversity of time may be the solution of

the diversity of the person proposing. That is to say, it is quite

legitimate to conclude that John's account takes up the incident at an

earlier period than the other Evangelists do, and that the full order

of events was this; that, privately, at the beginning of the day,

whilst the people were yet flocking to our Lord, He, to one of the

disciples alone, suggests the question, Whence shall we buy bread that

these may eat?' and that the answer, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is

not sufficient that every one of them may take a little,' explains for

us the suggestion of the same amount at a subsequent part of the day,

by the Apostles when they asked our Lord the question, Shall we go and

buy two hundred pennyworth of bread that these may eat?'

Be that as it may, we may pause for a moment upon this question of our

Lord's, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?'

Now notice what a lovely glimpse we get there into the quick-rising

sympathy of the Saviour with all forms of human necessity. He had gone

away to snatch a brief moment of rest. The rest is denied Him; the

hurrying crowds come pressing with their vulgar curiosity--for it was

nothing better--after Him. No movement of impatience passes across His

mind; no reluctance as He turns away from the vanishing prospect of a

quiet afternoon with His friends. He looks upon them, and the first

thought is a quick, instinctive movement of a divine and yet most human

sympathy. The question rises in His mind of how He was to provide for

them; they were not hungry yet; they had not thought where their bread

was to come from. But He cared for the careless, and His heart was

prophetic of their necessities, and quick to determine what He should

do' to supply them. So is it ever. Before we call, He answers. Thy

mercy, O loving Christ! needs no more than the sight of human

necessities, or even the anticipation of them, swiftly to bestir itself

for their satisfaction and their supply.

But, farther, He selects for the question Philip, a man who seems to

have been what is called--as if it were the highest praise--an

intensely practical person'; who seems to have had little faith in

anything that he could not get hold of by his senses, and who lived

upon the low level of common sense.' He always lays stress upon

seeing.' His answer to Nathanael when he said, Can any good thing come

out of Nazareth?' was, Come and see.' A very good answer, and yet one

that relies only on the external manifestation of Christ to the senses.

Then, on another occasion, he breaks in upon the lofty spiritualities

of our Lord's final discourse to His disciples, with the malapropos

request, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.' And so here,

to the man who believed in his eyesight, and did not easily apprehend

much else, Jesus puts this question, Where is the bread to come from

for all these people? This He said to prove him.' He hoped that the

question might have shaped itself in the hearer's mind into a promise,

and that he might have been able to say in answer, Thou canst supply;

we need not buy.'

So Christ does still. He puts problems before us, too, to settle; takes

us, as it were, into His confidence with interrogations that try us,

whether we can rise above the level of the material and visible, or

whether all our conceptions of possibilities are bounded by these. And

sometimes, even though the question at first sight seems to evoke only

such a response as it did here, it works more deeply down below

afterwards, and we are helped by the very difficulty to rise to a clear

faith.

Philip's answer is very significant. Two hundred pennyworth of bread

are not sufficient.' He casts his eye over the multitude, he makes a

rough, rapid calculation, one does not exactly see the data on which it

was based; and he comes to the conclusion, Two hundred pennyworth' (in

our English money some L. 7 or L. 8 worth) would give them each a

morsel. And no doubt he thought himself very practical. He was a man of

figures; he believed in what could be put into tables and statistics.

Yes; and like a great many other people of his sort, he left out one

small element in his calculation, and that was Jesus Christ, and so his

answer went creeping along the low levels, dragging itself like a

half-wounded snake, when it might have risen on the wings of faith into

the empyrean, and soared and sung.

So learn that when we have to deal with Christ's working--and when have

we not to deal with Christ's working?--perhaps probabilities that can

be tabulated are not altogether the best bases upon which to rest our

calculations. Learn that the audacity of a faith that expects great

things, though there be nothing visible upon which to build, is wiser

and more prudent than the creeping common-sense that adheres to facts

which are shadows, and forgets that the chief fact is that we have an

Almighty Helper and Friend at our sides.

Still further, among these preliminaries, let us point to the

exhibition of the inadequate resources which Christ, according to the

fuller narrative in the other Evangelists, desired to know. There is a

little lad here with five barley loaves'--one per thousand--and two

small fishes'--insufficient in quantity and very, very common in

quality, for barley bread was the food of the poorest. But what are

they among so many?' And Christ says, Bring them to Me.'

Christ's preparation for making our poor resources adequate for

anything is to drive home into our hearts the consciousness of their

insufficiency. We need, first of all, to be brought to this, All that I

have is this wretched little stock; and what is that measured against

the work that I have to do, and the claims upon me?' Only when we are

brought to that can His great power pour itself into us and fill us

with rejoicing and overcoming strength. The old mystics used to say,

and they said truly: You must be emptied of yourself before you can be

filled by God.' And the first thing for any man to learn, in

preparation for receiving a mightier power than his own into his

opening heart, is to know that all his own strength is utter and

absolute weakness. What are they among so many?' When we have once gone

right down into the depths of felt impotence, and when our work has

risen before us, as if it were far too great for our poor strengths

which are weaknesses, then we are brought, and only then, into the

position in which we may begin to hope that power equal to our desire

will be poured into our souls.

And so the last of the preparations that I will touch upon is that

majestic preparation for blessing by obedience. And Jesus said, Make

the men sit down.' And there they sat themselves, as Mark puts it in

his picturesque way, like so many garden plots--the rectangular oblongs

in a garden in which pot-herbs are grown--on the green grass, below the

blue sky, by the side of the quiet lake. Cannot you fancy how some of

them seated themselves with a scoff, and some with a quiet smile of

incredulity; and some half sheepishly and reluctantly; and some in mute

expectancy; and some in foolish wonder; and yet all of them with a

partial obedience? And says John in the true translation: So the men

sat down, therefore Jesus took the loaves.' Sit you down where He bids

you, and your mouths will not be long empty. Do the things He tells

you, and you will get the food that you need. Our business is to obey

and to wait, and His business is, when we are seated, to open His hand

and let the mercy drop. So much for the preparations for this great

miracle.

II. Now, in the next place, a word as to the sign itself.

I take two lessons, and two only, out of it. I see in it, first, a

revelation of Christ, as continually through all the ages sustaining

men's physical life. And I see in it, second, a symbol of Christ as

Himself the Bread of Life.

As to the first, there is here, I believe, a revelation of the law of

the universe, of Christ as being through all the ages the Sustainer of

the physical life of men. What was done then once, with the suppression

of certain links in the chain, is done always, with the introduction of

those links. The miraculous moment in the narrative is not described to

us. We do not know where or when there came in the supernatural power

which multiplied the loaves--probably as they passed from the hand of

the Master. But be that as it may, it was Christ's will that made the

provision which fed all these five thousand. And I believe that the

teaching of Scripture is in accordance with the deepest philosophy,

that the one cause of all physical phenomena is the will of a present

God; howsoever that may usually conform to the ordinary method of

working which people generalise and call laws. The reason why anything

is, and the reason why all things change, is the energy there and then

of the indwelling God who is in all His works, and who is the only Will

and Power in the physical world.

And I believe, further, that Scripture teaches us that that continuous

will, which is the cause of all phenomena and the underlying

subsistence on which all things repose, is all managed and mediated by

Him who from of old was named the Word; in whom was life, and without

whom was not anything made that was made.' Our Christ is Creator, our

Christ is Sustainer, our Christ moves the stars and feeds the sparrows.

He was before all things, and in Him all things consist.' He opens His

hand--and there is the print of a nail in it--and satisfies the desire

of every living thing.'

So learn how to think of second causes, and see in this story a

transient manifestation, in unusual form, of an eternal and permanent

fact. Jesus took the loaves and distributed to them that were set down.

And so, secondly, the miracle is a sign--a symbol of Him as the true

Bread and Food of the world. That is the explanation and commentary

which He Himself appends to it in the subsequent part of the chapter,

in the great discourse which is founded upon this miracle.

I am the Bread of Life.' There is a triple statement by our Lord upon

this subject in the remaining portion of the chapter. He says, I am the

Bread of Life.' My personality is that which not only sustains life

when it is given, but gives life to them that feed upon it. But more

than that, the bread which I will give,' pointing to some future

giving' beyond the present moment, and therefore something more than

His life and example, is My flesh, which'--in some as yet unexplained

way--I give for the life of the world.' And that there may be no

misunderstanding, there is a third, deeper, more mysterious statement

still: My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.'

Repulsive and paradoxical, but in its very offensiveness and paradox,

proclaiming that it covers a mighty truth, and the truth, brother, is

this, the one Food that gives life to will, affections, conscience,

understanding, to the whole spirit of a man, is that great Sacrifice of

the Incarnate Lord who gave upon the Cross His flesh, and on the Cross

shed His blood, for the life of the world that was dead in trespasses

and sins.' Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us, and we feed on

the sacrifice. Let your conscience, your heart, your desires, your

anticipations, your understanding, your will, your whole being feed on

Him. He will be cleansing, He will be love, He will be fruition, He

will be hope, He will be truth, He will be righteousness, He will be

all. Feed upon Him by that faith which is the true eating of the true

Bread, and your souls shall live.

And notice finally here, the result of this miracle as transferred to

the region of symbol. They did all eat and were filled'; men, women,

children, both sexes, all ages, all classes, found the food that they

needed in the bread that came from Christ's hands. If any man wants

dainties that will tickle the palates of Epicureans, let him go

somewhere else. But if he wants bread, to keep the life in and to stay

his hunger, let him go to this Christ who is human nature's daily

food.'

The world has scoffed for nineteen centuries at the barley bread that

the Gospel provides; coarse by the side of its confectionery, but it is

enough to give life to all who eat it. It goes straight to the primal

necessities of human nature. It does not coddle a class, or pander to

unwholesome, diseased, or fastidious appetites. It is the food of the

world, and not of a section. All men can relish it, all men need it. It

is offered to them all.

And more than that; notice the inexhaustible abundance. They did all

eat, and were filled.' And then they took up--not of the fragments,' as

our Bible gives it, conveying the idea of the crumbs that littered the

grass after the repast was over, but of the broken pieces'--the

portions that came from Christ's hands--twelve baskets full, an

immensely greater quantity than they had to start with. The gift doth

stretch itself as tis received.' Other goods and other possessions

perish with the using, but this increases with use. The more one eats,

the more there is for him to eat. And all the world may live upon it

for ever, and there will be more at the end than there was at the

beginning.

Brethren, why do ye spend your money for that which is not bread'?

There is no answer worthy of a rational soul, no answer that will stand

either the light of conscience or the clearer light of the Day of

Judgment. I come to you now, and although my poor words may be but like

the barley bread and the two fishes--nothing amongst all this gathered

audience--I come with Christ in my hands, and I say to you, Eat, and

your souls shall live.' He will spread a table for you in the

wilderness, and take you to sit at last at His table in His Kingdom.

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FRAGMENTS' OR BROKEN PIECES'

When they were filled, He said unto His disciples, Gather up the

fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.'--JOHN vi. 12.

The Revised Version correctly makes a very slight, but a very

significant change in the words of this verse. Instead of fragments' it

reads broken pieces.' The change seems very small, but the effect of it

is considerable. It helps our picture of the scene by correcting a very

common misapprehension as to what it was which the Apostles are bid to

gather up. The general notion, I suppose, is that the fragments' are

the crumbs that fell from each man's hands, as he ate, and the picture

before the imagination of the ordinary reader is that of the Apostles'

carefully collecting the debris of the meal from the grass where it had

dropped. But the true notion is that the broken pieces which remain

over' are the unused portions into which our Lord's miracle-working

hand had broken the bread, and the true picture is that of the Apostles

carefully putting away in store for future use the abundant provision

which their Lord had made, beyond the needs of the hungry thousands.

And that conception of the command teaches far more beautiful and

deeper lessons than the other.

For if the common translation and notion be correct, all that is taught

us, or at least what is principally taught us, is the duty of thrift

and careful economy; whereas the other shows more clearly that what is

taught us is that Jesus Christ always gets ready for His people

something over and above the exact limits of their bare need at the

moment, that He prepares for His poor and hungry dependants in royal

fashion, leaving ever a wide margin of difference between what would be

just enough to keep the life in them, and His liberal housekeeping.

Further, we are taught a lesson of wise husbandry and economy in the

use of that overplus of grace which Christ ministers, and are

instructed that the laws of prudent thrift have as honoured a place in

the management of spiritual as of temporal wealth. Gather up,' says our

Lord, the pieces which I broke, the large provision which I made for

possible wants. My gifts are in excess of the requirements of the

moment. Take care of them till you need them.' That is a worthier

interpretation of His command than one which merely sees in it an

exhortation to thrifty taking care of the crumbs that fell from the

lips of the hungry eaters.

Looking at this command, then, with this slight alteration of

rendering, and consequent widening of scope, we may briefly try to

gather up the lessons which it obviously suggests.

I. We have that thought, to which I have already referred, as more

strikingly brought out by the slight alteration of translation, which,

by the use of broken pieces,' suggests the connection with Christ's

breaking the loaves and fishes. We are taught to think of the large

surplus in Christ's gifts over and above our need. Our Lord has Himself

given us a commentary upon this miracle. All Christ's miracles are

parables, for all teach us, on the level of natural and outward things,

lessons that are true in regard to the spiritual world; but this one is

especially symbolical, as indeed are all these recorded in John's

Gospel. And here we have Christ, on the day after the miracle,

commenting upon it in His long and profound discourse upon the Bread of

Life, which plainly intimates that He meant His office of feeding the

hungry crowds, with bread supernaturally increased by the touch of His

hand, to be but a picture and a guide which might lead to the

apprehension of the higher view of Himself as the bread of God which

came down from heaven,' feeding and giving life to the world' by His

broken body and shed blood.

So that we are not inventing a fanciful interpretation of an incident

not meant to have any meaning deeper than shows on the surface, when we

say that the abundance far beyond what the eaters could make use of at

the moment really represented the large surplus of inexhaustible

resources and unused grace which is treasured for us all in Christ

Jesus. Whom He feeds He feasts. His gifts answer our need, and

over-answer it, for He is able to do exceeding abundantly above that

which we ask or think,' and neither our conceptions, nor our petitions,

nor our present powers of receiving, are the real limits of the

illimitable grace that is laid up for us in Christ, and which,

potentially, we have each of us in our hands whenever we lay our hands

on Him.

Oh, dear friends! what you and I have ever had and felt of Christ's

power, sweetness, preciousness, and love is as nothing compared with

the infinite depths of all those which lie in Him. The sea fills the

little creeks along its shore, but it rolls in unfathomed depths,

boundless to the horizon away out there in the mid-Atlantic. And all

the present experience of all Christian people, of what Christ is, is

like the experience of the first settlers in some great undiscovered

continent; who timidly plant a little fringe of population round its

edge and grow their scanty crops there, whilst the great prairies of

miles and miles, with all their wealth and fertility, are lying

untrodden and unknown in the heart of the untraversed continent. The

most powerful telescope leaves nebulae unresolved, which, though they

seem but a dim dust of light, are all ablaze with mighty suns. The

goodness' which He has wrought before the sons of men for them that

fear' Him is, as the Psalmist adoringly exclaims, wondrously great,'

but still greater is that which the same verse of the Psalm

celebrates--the goodness which He has laid up for them that fear Him.'

The gold which is actually coined and passing from hand to hand, is but

a fraction, a mere scale, as it were, off the surface of the great

uncoined mass of bullion that lies stored in the vaults there. Christ

is a great deal more than any man, or than all men, have yet found Him

to be. Gather up the broken pieces'; and see that nothing of that

infinite preciousness of His be lost by us.

II. Then there is another very simple lesson which I draw. This command

suggests for us Christ's thrift (if I may use the word) in the

employment of His miraculous power.

Surely they might have said: If thou canst multiply five loaves into

all this abundance, why should we be trudging about, each with a basket

on his back full of bread, when we have with us He whose word can make

it for us at any moment?' Yes, but a law which characterises all the

miraculous, in both the Old and the New Testament, and which broadly

distinguishes Christ's miracles from all the false miracles of false

religions is this, that the miraculous is pared down to the smallest

possible amount, that not one hairsbreadth beyond the necessity shall

be done by miracle; that whatever men can do they shall do; that their

work shall stop as late, and begin again as soon as possible. Thus,

though Christ was going to raise Lazarus, men's hands had to roll away

the stone; and when Christ had raised Lazarus, men's hands had to loose

the napkins from his face. And though Christ was able to say to the

daughter of Jairus, Talitha cumi!' (damsel, arise!) His next word was:

Give her something to eat.' Where the miraculous was needed it was

used, and not a hairsbreadth beyond absolute necessity did it extend.

And so here Christ multiplies the bread, and yet each of the Apostles

has to take a basket, probably some kind of woven wicker-work article

which they would carry for holding their little necessaries in their

peregrinations; each Apostle has to take his basket, and perhaps

emptying it of some of his humble apparel, to fill it with these bits

of bread; for Christ was not going to work miracles where men's thrift

and prudence could be employed.

Nor does He do so now. We live by faith, and our dependence on Him can

never be too absolute. Only laziness sometimes dresses itself in the

garb and speaks with the tongue of faith, and pretends to be truthful

when it is only slothful. Why criest thou unto Me?' said God to Moses,

speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.' True faith

sets us to work. It is not to be perverted into idle and false

depending upon Him to work for us, when by the use of our own ten

fingers and our own brains, guided and strengthened by His working in

us, we can do the work that is set before us.

III. Still further, there is another lesson here. Not only does the

injunction show us Christ's thrift in the employment of the

supernatural, but it teaches us our duty of thrift and care in the use

of the spiritual grace bestowed upon us.

These men had given to them this miraculously made bread; but they had

to exercise ordinary thrift in the preservation of the supernatural

gift. Christ has been given to you by the most stupendous miracle that

ever was or can be wrought, and if you are Christian people, you have

the Spirit of Christ given to you, to dwell in your hearts, to make you

wise and fair, gentle and strong, and altogether Christlike. But you

have to take care of these gifts. You have to exercise the common

virtues of economy and thrift in your use of the divine gifts as in

your use of the common things of daily life. You have to use wisely and

not waste the Bread of God that came down from heaven, or that Bread of

God will not feed you. You have to provide the basket in which to carry

the unexhausted residue of the divine gift, or you may stand hungry in

the very midst of plenty, and whilst within arm's length of you there

is bread enough and to spare to feed the whole world.

The lesson of my text, which is most eminently brought out if we adopt

the translation which I have referred to at the beginning of these

remarks, is, then, just this: Christian men, be watchful stewards of

that great gift of a living Christ, the food of your souls, that has

been by miracle bestowed upon you. Such gathering together for future

need of the unused residue of grace may be accomplished by three ways.

First, there must be a diligent use of the grace given. See that you

use to the very full, in the measure of your present power of absorbing

and your present need, the gift bestowed upon you. Be sure that you

take in as much of Christ as you can contain before you begin to think

of what to do with the overplus. If we are not careful to take what we

can, and to use what we need, of Christ, there is little chance of our

being faithful stewards of the surplus. The water in a mill-stream runs

over the trough in great abundance when the wheel is not working, and

one reason why so many Christians seem to have so much more given to

them in Christ than they need is because they are doing no work to use

up the gift.

A second essential to such stewardship is the careful guarding of the

grace given from whatever would injure it. Let not worldliness,

business, cares of the world, the sorrows of life, its joys, duties,

anxieties or pleasures--let not these so come into your hearts that

they will elbow Christ out of your hearts, and dull your appetite for

the true Bread that came down from heaven.

And lastly, not only by use and by careful guarding, but also by

earnest desire for larger gifts of the Christ who is large beyond all

measure, shall we receive more and more of His sweetness and His

preciousness into our hearts, and of His beauty and glory into our

transfigured characters. The basket that we carry, this recipient heart

of ours, is elastic. It can stretch to hold any amount that you like to

put into it. The desire for more of Christ's grace will stretch its

capacity, and as its capacity increases the inflowing gift greatens,

and a larger Christ fills the larger room of my poor heart.

So the lesson is taught us of our prudence in the care and use of the

grace bestowed on us, and we are bidden to cherish a happy confidence

in the inexhaustible resources of Christ, and the continual gift in the

future of even larger measures of grace, which are all ours already,

given to us at the first reception of Him into our hearts, and only

needing our faithfulness to be growingly ours in experience as they are

ours from the first in germ.

IV. Finally, a solemn warning is implied in this command, and its

reason that nothing be lost.'

Then there is a possibility of losing the gift that is freely given to

us. We may waste the bread, and so, sometime or other when we are

hungry, awake to the consciousness that it has dropped out of our slack

hands. The abundance of Christ's grace may, so far as you are profited

or enriched by it, be like the unclaimed millions of money which nobody

asks for and that is of use to no living soul. You may be paupers while

all God's riches in glory are at your disposal, and starving while

baskets full of bread broken for us by Christ lie unused at our sides.

Some of us have never tasted the sweetness or been fed by the

nutritiousness of that Bread of God which came down from heaven. And

more marvellous still, there may be some of us, who having come to

Christ hungry and been fed by Him, have ceased to care for the pure

nourishment and taste for the manna, and are turning again with gross

appetite to the husks in the swine's trough. Negligent Christians!

worldly Christians! you who care more for money and other dainties and

delights which perish with the using-- backsliding Christians, who once

hungered and thirsted for more of Christ, and now have no longing for

Him--awake to the danger in which you stand of letting all your

spiritual wealth slip through your fingers; behold the treasures, yet

unreached, within your grasp, and seek to garner and realise them.

Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, lest everything be lost.

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THE FIFTH MIRACLE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

So when they had rowed about five-and-twenty or thirty furlongs, they

see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they

were afraid. 20. But He said unto them, It is I; be not afraid.'--JOHN

vi. 19, 20.

There are none of our Lord's parables recorded in this Gospel, but all

the miracles which it narrates are parables. Moral and religious truth

is communicated by the outward event, as in the parable it is

communicated by the story. The mere visible fact becomes more than

semi-transparent. The analogy between the spiritual and the natural

world which men instinctively apprehend, of which the poet and the

orator and the religious teacher have always made abundant use, and

which it has sometimes been attempted, unsuccessfully as I think, to

elevate to the rank of a scientific truth, underlies the whole series

of these miracles. It is the principal if not the only key to the

meaning of this one before us.

The symbolism which regards life under the guise of a voyage, and its

troubles and difficulties under the metaphor of storm and tempest, is

especially natural to nations that take kindly to the water, like us

Englishmen. I do not know that there is any instance, either in the Old

or in the New Testament, of the use of that to us very familiar

metaphor; but the emblem of the sea as the symbol of trouble, unrest,

rebellious power, is very familiar to the writers of the Old Testament.

And the picture of the divine path as in the waters, and of the divine

prerogative as being to tread upon the heights of the sea,' as Job has

it, is by no means unknown. So the natural symbolism, and the Old

Testament use of the expressions, blend together, as I think, in

suggesting the one point of view from which this miracle is to be

regarded.

It is found in two of the other Evangelists, and the condensed account

of it which we have in this Gospel, by its omission of Peter's walking

on the water, and of some other smaller but graphic details that the

other Evangelists give us, serves to sharpen the symbolical meaning of

the whole story, and to bring that as its great purpose and

signification into prominence.

We shall, I think, then, best gain the lessons intended to be drawn if

we simply follow the points of the narrative in their order as they

stand here.

I. We have here, first of all, then, the struggling toilers.

The other Evangelists tell us that after the feeding of the five

thousand our Lord constrained' His disciples to get into the ship, and

to pass over to the other side. The language implies unwillingness, to

some extent, on their part, and the exercise of authority upon His. Our

Evangelist, who does not mention the constraint, supplies us with the

reason for it. The preceding miracle had worked up the excitement of

the mob to a very dangerous point. Crowds are always the same, and this

crowd thought, as any other crowd anywhere and in any age would have

done, that the prophet that could make bread at will was the kind of

prophet whom they wanted. So they determined to take Him by force, and

make Him a king; and Christ, seeing the danger, and not desiring that

His Kingdom should be furthered by such unclean hands and gross

motives, determined to withdraw Himself into the loneliness of the

bordering hills. It was wise to divide the little group; it would

distract attention; it might lead some of the people, as we know it did

lead them, to follow the boat when they found it was gone. It would

save the Apostles from being affected by the coarse, smoky enthusiasm

of the crowd. It would save them from revealing the place of His

retirement. It might enable Him to steal away more securely unobserved;

so they are sent across to the other side of the lake, some five or six

miles. An hour or two might have done it, but for some unknown reason

they seem to have lingered. Perhaps they had no special call for haste.

The Paschal moon, nearly full, would be shining down upon the waters;

their hearts and minds would be busy with the miracle which they had

just seen. And so they may have drifted along, not caring much when

they reached their destination. But suddenly one of the gusts of wind

which are frequently found upon mountain lakes, especially towards

nightfall, rose and soon became a gale with which they could not

battle. Our Evangelist does not tell us how long it lasted, but we get

a note of time from St. Mark, who says it was about the fourth watch of

the night'; that is between the hours of three and six in the morning

of the subsequent day. So that for some seven or eight hours at least

they had been tugging at the useless oars, or sitting shivering, wet

and weary, in the boat.

Is it not the history of the Church in a nutshell? Is it not the symbol

of life for us all? The solemn law under which we live demands

persistent effort, and imposes continual antagonism upon us; there is

no reason why we should regard that as evil, or think ourselves hardly

used, because we are not fair-weather sailors. The end of life is to

make men; the meaning of all events is to mould character. Anything

that makes me stronger is a blessing, anything that develops my morale

is the highest good that can come to me. If therefore antagonism mould

in me

The wrestling thews that throw the world,'

and give me good, strong muscles, and put tan and colour into my cheek,

I need not mind the cold and the wet, nor care for the whistling of the

wind in my face, nor the dash of the spray over the bows. Summer

sailing in fair weather, amidst land-locked bays, in blue seas, and

under calm skies, may be all very well for triflers, but

Blown seas and storming showers'

are better if the purpose of the voyage be to brace us and call out our

powers.

And so be thankful if, when the boat is crossing the mouth of some glen

that opens upon the lake, a sudden gust smites the sheets and sends you

to the helm, and takes all your effort to keep you from sinking. Do not

murmur, or think that God's Providence is strange, because many and

many a time when it is dark, and Jesus is not yet come to us,' the

storm of wind comes down upon the lake and threatens to drive us from

our course. Let us rather recognise Him as the Lord who, in love and

kindness, sends all the different kinds of weather which, according to

the old proverb, make up the full-summed year.

And then notice how, in this first picture of our text, the symbolism

so naturally lends itself to spiritual meanings, not only in regard to

the tempest that caught the unthinking voyagers, but also in regard to

other points; such as the darkness amidst which they had to fight the

tempest, and the absence of the Master. Once before, they had been

caught in a similar storm on the lake, but it was daylight then, and

Jesus was with them, and that made all the difference. This time it was

night, and they looked up in vain to the green Eastern hills, and

wondered where in their folds He was lurking, so far from their help.

Mark gives us one sweet touch when he tells us that Christ on the

hillside there saw them toiling in rowing, but they did not see Him. No

doubt they felt themselves deserted, and sent many a wistful glance of

longing towards the shore where He was. Hard thoughts of Him may have

been in some of their minds. Master, carest Thou not?' would be

springing to some of their lips with more apparent reason than in the

other storm on the lake. But His calm and loving gaze looked down

pitying on all their fear and toil. The darkness did not hide from Him,

nor His own security on the steadfast land make Him forget, nor his

communion with the Father so absorb Him as to exclude thoughts of them.

It is a parable and a prophecy of the perpetual relation between the

absent Lord and the toiling Church. He is on the mountain while we are

on the sea. The stable eternity of the Heavens holds Him; we are tossed

on the restless mutability of time, over which we toil at His command.

He is there interceding for us. Whilst He prays He beholds, and He

beholds that He may help us by His prayer. The solitary crew were not

so solitary as they thought. That little dancing speck on the waters,

which held so much blind love and so much fear and trouble, was in His

sight, as on the calm mountain-top He communed with God. No wonder that

weary hearts and lonely ones, groping amidst the darkness, and fighting

with the tempests and the sorrows of lift, have ever found in our story

a symbol that comes to them with a prophecy of hope and an assurance of

help, and have rejoiced to know that they on the sea are beheld of the

Christ in the sky, and that the darkness hideth not from' His loving

eye.

II. And now turn to the next stage of the story before us. We have the

approaching Christ.

When they had rowed about five-and-twenty or thirty furlongs,' and so

were just about the middle of the lake, they see Jesus walking on the

sea and drawing nigh unto the ship.' They were about half-way across

the lake. We do not know at what hour in the fourth watch the Master

came. But probably it was towards daybreak. Toiling had endured for a

night. It would be in accordance with the symbolism that joy and help

should come with the morning.

If we look for a moment at the miraculous fact, apart from the

symbolism, we have a revelation here of Christ as the Lord of the

material universe, a kingdom wider in its range and profounder in its

authority than that which that shouting crowd had sought to force upon

Him. His will consolidated the yielding wave, or sustained His material

body on the tossing surges. Whether we suppose the miracle as wrought

on the one or the other, makes no difference to its value as a

manifestation of the glory of Christ, and of His power over the

physical order of things. In the latter case there would, perhaps, be a

hint of a power residing in His material frame, of which we possibly

have other phases, as in the Transfiguration, which may be a prophecy

of what lordship over nature is possible to a sinless manhood. However

that may be, we have here a wonderful picture which is true for all

ages of the mighty Christ, to whose gentle footfall the unquiet surges

are as a marble pavement; and who draws near in the purposes of His

love, unhindered by antagonism, and using even opposing forces as the

path for His triumphant progress. Two lessons may be drawn from this.

One is that in His marvellous providence Christ uses all the tumults

and unrest, the opposition and tempests which surround the ship that

bears His followers, as the means of achieving His purposes. We stand

before a mystery to which we have no key when we think of these two

certain facts; first, the Omnipotent redeeming will of God in Christ;

and, second, the human antagonism which is able to rear itself against

that. And we stand in the presence of another mystery, most blessed,

and yet which we cannot unthread, when we think, as we most assuredly

may, that in some mysterious fashion He works His purposes by the very

antagonism to His purposes, making even head-winds fill the sails, and

planting His foot on the white crests of the angry and changeful

billows. How often in the world's history has this scene repeated

itself, and by a divine irony the enemies have become the helpers of

Christ's cause, and what they plotted for destruction has turned out

rather to the furtherance of the Gospel! He maketh the wrath of man to

praise Him, and with the residue thereof He girdeth Himself.'

Another lesson for our individual lives is this, that Christ, in His

sweetness and His gentle sustaining help, comes near to us all across

the sea of sorrow and trouble. A more tender, a more gracious sense of

His nearness to us is ever granted to us in the time of our darkness

and our grief than is possible to us in the sunny hours of joy. It is

always the stormy sea that Christ comes across, to draw near to us; and

they who have never experienced the tempest have yet to learn the

inmost sweetness of His presence. When it is night, and it is dark, at

the hour which is the keystone of night's black arch, Christ comes to

us, striding across the stormy waters. Sorrow brings Him near to us. Do

you see that sorrow does not drive you away from Him!

III. Then, still further, we note in the story before us the terror and

the recognition.

St. John does not tell us why they were afraid. There is no need to

tell us. They see, possibly in the chill uncertain light of the grey

dawn breaking over the Eastern hills, a Thing coming to them across the

water there. They had fought gallantly with the storm, but this

questionable shape freezes their heart's blood, and a cry, that is

audible above even the howling of the wind and the dash of the waves,

gives sign of the superstitious terror that crept round the hearts of

those commonplace, rude men.

I do not dwell upon the fact that the average man, if he fancies that

anything from out of the Unseen is near him, shrinks in fear. I do not

ask you whether that is not a sign and indication of the deep

conviction that lies in men's souls, of a discord between themselves

and the unseen world; but I ask you if we do not often mistake the

coming Master, and tremble before Him when we ought to be glad?

We are often so absorbed with our work, so busy tugging at the oar, so

anxiously watching the set of current, so engaged in keeping the helm

right, that we have no time and no eyes to look across the ocean and

see who it is that is coming to us through all the hurly-burly. Our

tears fill our eyes, and weave a veil between us and the Master. And

when we do see that there is Something there, we are often afraid of

it, and shrink from it. And sometimes when a gentle whisper of

consolation, or some light air, as it were, of consciousness of His

presence, breathes through our souls, we think that it is only a

phantasm of our own making, and that the coming Christ is nothing more

than the play of our thoughts and imaginations.

Oh, brethren, let no absorption in cares and duties, let no unchildlike

murmurings, let no selfish abandonment to sorrow, blind you to the Lord

who always comes near troubled hearts, if they will only look and see!

Let no reluctance to entertain religious ideas, no fear of contact with

the Unseen, no shrinking from the thought of Christ as a Kill-joy keep

you from seeing Him as He draws near to you in your troubles. And let

no sly, mocking Mephistopheles of doubt, nor any poisonous air, blowing

off the foul and stagnant marshes of present materialism, make you

fancy that the living Reality, treading on the flood there, is a dream

or a fancy or the projection of your own imagination on to the void of

space. He is real, whatever may be phenomenal and surface. The storm is

not so real as the Christ, the waves not so substantial as He who

stands upon them. They will pass and quieten, He will abide for ever.

Lift up your hearts and be glad, because the Lord comes to you across

the waters, and hearken to His voice: It is I! Be not afraid.'

The encouragement not to fear follows the proclamation, It is I!' What

a thrill of glad confidence must have poured itself into their hearts,

when once they rose to the height of that wondrous fact!

Well roars the storm to those who hear A deeper voice across the

storm.'

There is no fear in the consciousness of His presence. It is His old

word: Be not afraid!' And He breathes it whithersoever He comes; for

His coming is the banishment of danger and the exorcism of dread. So

that if only you and I, in the midst of all storm and terror, can say

It is the Lord,' then we may catch up the grand triumphant chorus of

the old psalm, and say: Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled,

and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, yet I will not

fear.' The Lord is with us; the everlasting Christ is our Helper, our

Refuge, and our Strength.

IV. So, lastly, we have here in this story the end of the tempest and

of the voyage.

Our Evangelist does not record, as the others do, that the storm ceased

upon Christ's being welcomed into the little boat. The other

Evangelists do not record, as he does, the completion of the voyage.

Immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.' The two things

are cause and effect. I do not suppose, as many do, that a subordinate

miracle is to be seen in that last clause of our text, or that the

immediately' is to be taken as if it meant that without one moment's

delay, or interval, the voyage was completed; but only, which I think

is all that is needful, that the falling of the tempest and the calming

of the waters which followed upon the Master's entrance into the vessel

made the remainder of the voyage comparatively brief and swift.

It is not always true, it is very seldom true, that when Christ comes

on board opposition ends, and the haven is reached. But it is always

true that when Christ comes on board a new spirit enters into the men

who have Him for their companion, and are conscious that they have. It

makes their work easy, and makes them more than conquerors' over what

yet remains. With what a different spirit the weary men would bend

their backs to the oars once more when they had the Master on board,

and with what a different spirit you and I will set ourselves to our

work if we are sure of His presence. The worst of trouble is gone when

Christ shares it with us. There is a wonderful charm to stay His rough

wind in the assurance that in all our affliction He is afflicted. If we

feel that we are following in His footsteps, we feel that He stands

between us and the blast, a refuge from the storm and a covert from the

tempest. And if still, as no doubt will be the case, we have our share

of trouble and storm and sorrow and difficulty, yet the worst of the

gale will be passed, and though a long swell may still heave, the

terror and the danger will have gone with the night, and hope and

courage and gladness revive as the morning's sun breaks over the still

unquiet waves, and shows us our Master with us and the white walls of

the port glinting in the level beams.

Friends, life is a voyage, anyhow, with plenty of storm and danger and

difficulty and weariness and exposure and anxiety and dread and sorrow,

for every soul of man. But if you will take Christ on board, it will be

a very different thing from what it will be if you cross the wan waters

alone. Without Him you will make shipwreck of yourselves; with Him your

voyage may seem perilous and be tempestuous, but He will make the storm

a calm,' and will bring you to the haven of your desire.

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HOW TO WORK THE WORK OF GOD

Then said they unto Him, What shall we do, that we might work the works

of God? 29. Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God,

that ye, believe on Him whom He hath sent.'--JOHN vi. 28, 29.

The feeding of the five thousand was the most popular' of Christ's

miracles. The Evangelist tells us, with something between a smile and a

sigh, that when the people saw it, they said, This is of a truth that

Prophet that should come into the world,' and they were so delighted

with Him and with it, that they wanted to get up an insurrection on the

spot, and make a King of Him. I wonder if there are any of that sort of

people left. If two men were to come into Manchester to-morrow morning,

and one of them were to offer material good, and the other wisdom and

peace of heart, which of them, do you think, would have the larger

following? We need not cast a stone at the unblushing, frank admiration

that these men had for a Prophet who could feed them, for that is

exactly the sort of prophet that a great number of us would like best

if they spoke out.

So Jesus Christ had to escape from the inconvenient enthusiasm of these

mistaken admirers of His; and they followed Him in their eagerness, but

were met with words which lift them into another region and damp their

zeal. He tries to turn away their thoughts from the miracle to a far

loftier gift. He contrasts the trouble which they willingly took in

order to get a meal with their indifference as to obtaining the true

bread from heaven, and He bids them work for it just as they had shown

themselves ready to work for the other.

They put to Him this question of my text, so strangely blending as it

does right and wrong, You have bid us work; tell us how to work? What

must we do that we may work the works of God?' Christ answers, in words

that illuminate their confusions and clear the whole matter, This is

the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.'

I. Faith, then, is a work.

You know that the commonplace of evangelical teaching opposes faith to

works; and the opposition is perfectly correct, if it be rightly

understood. But I have a strong impression that a great deal of our

preaching goes clean over the heads of our hearers, because we take for

granted, and they fancy that they understand, the meaning of terms

because the terms themselves are so familiar. And I believe that many

people go to churches and chapels all their lives long, and hear this

doctrine dinned into them, that they are to be saved by faith, and not

by works, and never approach a definite understanding of what it means.

So let me just for a moment try to clear up the terms of this

apparently paradoxical statement that faith is a work. What do we mean

by faith? What do you mean by saying that you have faith in your

friend, in your wife, in your husband, in your guide? You simply mean,

and we mean, that you trust the person, grasping him by the act of

trust. On trust the whole fabric of human society depends, as well as

in another aspect of the same expression does the whole fabric of

Manchester commerce. Faith, confidence, the leaning of myself on one

discerned to be true, trusty, strong, sufficient for the purpose in

hand, whatever it may be--that, and nothing more mysterious, nothing

further away from daily life and the common emotions which knit us to

one another, is, as I take it, what the New Testament means when it

insists upon faith.

Ah, we all exercise it. You put it forth in certain low levels and

directions. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her,' is the

short summary of the happy lives of many, I have no doubt, of my

present hearers. Have you none of that confidence to spare for God? Is

it all meant to be poured out upon weak, fallible, changeful creatures

like ourselves, and none of it to rise to the One in whom absolute

confidence may eternally be fixed?

But then, of course, as we may see by the exercise of the same emotion

in regard to one Another, the under side (as I have been accustomed to

say to you) of this confidence in God or Christ is diffidence of

myself. There is no real exercise of confidence which does not involve,

as an essential part of itself, the going out from myself in order that

I may lay all the weight and the responsibility of the matter in hand

upon Him in whom I trust. And so Christian faith is compounded of these

two elements, or rather, it has these two sides which correspond to one

another. The same figure is convex or concave according as you look at

it from one side or another. If you look at faith from one side, it

rises towards God; if from the other, it hollows itself out into a

great emptiness. And so the under side of faith is distrust; and he

that puts his confidence in God thereby goes out of himself, and

declares that in himself there is nothing to rest upon.

Now that two-sided confidence and diffidence, trust and distrust, which

are one, is truly a work. It is not an easy one either; it is the

exercise of our own inmost nature. It is an effort of will. It has to

be done by coercing ourselves. It has to be maintained in the face of

many temptations and difficulties. The contrast between faith and work

is between an inward act and a crowd of outward performances. But the

faith which knits me to God is my act, and I am responsible for it.

But yet it is not a work, just because it is a ceasing from my own

works, and going out from myself that He may enter in. Only remember,

when we say, Not by works of righteousness, but by the faith of

Christ,' we are but proclaiming that the inward man must exercise that

act of self-abnegation and confession of its own impotence, and ceasing

from all reliance on anything which it does, whereby, and whereby

alone, it can be knit to God. Labour not for the meat that perisheth,

but for that meat which endureth unto eternal life . . . . This is the

work of God, that ye believe.' You are responsible for doing that, or

for not doing it.

II. Secondly, faith, and not a multitude of separate acts, is what

pleases God.

Mark the difference between the form of the question and that of the

answer. The people say, What are we to do that we may work the works of

God?' Christ answers in the singular: This is the work.' They thought

of a great variety of observances and deeds. He gathers them all up

into one. They thought of a pile, and that the higher it rose the more

likely they were to be accepted. He unified the requirement, and He

brought it all down to this one act, in which all other acts are

included, and on which alone the whole weight of a man's salvation is

to rest. What shall we do that we might work the works of God?' is a

question asked in all sorts of ways, by the hearts of men all round

about us; and what a babble of answers comes! The priest says, Rites

and ceremonies.' The thinker says, Culture, education.' The moralist

says, Do this, that, and the other thing,' and enumerates a whole

series of separate acts. Jesus Christ says, One thing is needful . . .

. This is the work of God.' He brushes away the sacerdotal answer and

the answer of the mere moralist, and He says, No! Not do; but trust.'

In so far as that is act, it is the only act that you need.

That is evidently reasonable. The man is more than his work; motive is

more important than action; character is deeper than conduct. God is

pleased, not by what men do, but by what men are. We must be first, and

then we shall do. And it is obviously reasonable, because we can find

analogies to the requirement in all other relations of life. What would

you care for a child that scrupulously obeyed, and did not love or

trust? What would a prince think of a subject who was ostentatious in

acts of loyalty, and all the while was plotting and nurturing treason

in his heart?

If doing separate acts of righteousness be the way to work the works of

God, then no man has ever done them. For it is a plain fact that every

man falls below his own conscience--which conscience is less scrupulous

than the divine law. The worst of us knows a great deal more than the

best of us does; and our lives, universally, are, at the best, lives of

partial effort after unreached attainments of obedience and of virtue.

But, even supposing that we could perform, far more completely than we

do, the requirements of our own consciences, and conform to the evident

duties of our position and relations, do you think that without faith

we should be therein working the works of God? Suppose a man were able

fully to realise his own ideal of goodness, without any confidence in

God underlying all his acts; do you think that these would be acts that

would please God? It seems to me that, however lovely and worthy of

admiration, looked at with human eyes only, many lives are, which have

nobly and resolutely fought against evil, and struggled after good, if

they have lacked the crowning grace of doing this for God's sake, they

lack, I was going to say, almost everything; I will not say that, but I

will say that they lack that which makes them acceptable, well-pleasing

to Him. The poorest, the most imperfect realisation of our duty and

ideal of conduct which has in it a love towards God and a faith in Him

that would fain do better if it could, is a nobler thing, I venture to

say, in the eyes of Heaven--which are the truth-seeing eyes--than the

noblest achievements of an untrusting soul. It does not seem to me that

to say so is bigotry or narrowness or anything else but the plain

deduction from this, that a man's relation to God is the deepest thing

about him, and that if that be right, other things will come right, and

if that be wrong nothing is as right as it might be.

Here we have Jesus Christ laying the foundation for the doctrine which

is often said to be Pauline, as if that meant something else than

coming from Jesus Christ. We often hear people say, Oh, your

evangelical teaching of justification by faith, and all that, comes out

of Paul's Epistles, not out of Christ's teaching, nor out of John's

Gospel.' Well, there is a difference, which it is blindness not to

recognise, between the seeds of teaching in our Lord's words, and the

flowers and fruit of these seeds, which we get in the more systematised

and developed teaching of the Epistles. I frankly admit that, and I

should expect it, with my belief as to who Christ is, and who Paul is.

But in that saying, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him

whom He hath sent,' is the germ of everything that Paul has taught us

about the works of the law being of no avail, and faith being alone and

unfailing in its power of uniting men to God, and bringing them into

the possession of eternal life. The saying stands in John's Gospel, and

so Paul and John alike received, though in different fashions, and

wrought out on different lines of subsequent teaching, the germinal

impulse from these words of the Master. Let us hear no more about

salvation by faith being a Pauline addition to Christ's Gospel, for the

lips of Christ Himself have declared this is the work of God, that ye

believe on Him whom He hath sent.'

III. Thirdly, this faith is the productive parent of all separate works

of God.

The teaching that I have been trying to enforce has, I know, been so

presented as to make a pillow for indolence, and to be closely allied

to immorality. It has been so presented, but it has not been so

presented half as often as its enemies would have us believe. For I

know of but very few, and those by no means the most prominent and

powerful of the preachers of the great doctrine of salvation by faith,

who have not added, as its greatest teacher did: Let ours also be

careful to maintain good works for necessary uses.' But the true

teaching is not that trust is a substitute for work, but that it is the

foundation of work. The Gospel is, first of all, Trust; then, set

yourselves to do the works of faith. It works by love, it is the

opening of the heart to the entrance of the life of Christ, and, of

course, when that life comes in, it will act in the man in a manner

appropriate to its origin and source, and he that by faith has been

joined to Jesus Christ, and has opened his heart to receive into that

heart the life of Christ, will, as a matter of course, bring forth, in

the measure of his faith, the fruits of righteousness.

We are surely not despising fruits and flowers when we insist upon the

root from which they shall come. A man may take separate acts of

partial goodness, as you see children in the springtime sticking

daisies on the spikes of a thorn-twig picked from the hedges. But these

will die. The basis of all righteousness is faith, and the

manifestation of faith is practical righteousness. Show Me thy faith by

thy works' is Christ's teaching quite as much as it is the teaching of

His sturdy servant James. And so, dear friends, we are going the

shortest way to enrich lives with all the beauties of possible human

perfection when we say, Begin at the beginning. The longest way round

is the shortest way home; trust Him with all your hearts first, and

that will effloresce into "whatsoever things are lovely and whatever

things are of good report."' In the beautiful metaphor of the Apostle

Peter, in his second Epistle, Faith is the damsel who leads in the

chorus of consequent graces; and we are exhorted to add to our faith

virtue,' and all the others that unfold themselves in harmonious

sequence from that one central source.

If I had time I should be glad to turn for a moment to the light which

such considerations cast upon subjects that are largely occupying the

attention of the Christian Church to-day. I should like to insist that,

before you talk much about applied Christianity, you should be very

sure that in men there is a Christianity to apply. I venture to profess

my own humble belief that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred,

Christian ministers and churches will do no more for the social,

political, and intellectual and moral advancement of men and the

elevation of the people by sticking to their own work and preaching

this Gospel--This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He

hath sent.'

IV. Lastly, this faith secures the bread of life.

The bread of life is the starting-point of the whole conversation. In

the widest possible sense it is whatsoever truly stills the hunger of

the immortal soul. In a deeper sense it is the person of Jesus Christ

Himself, for He not only says that He will give, but that He is the

Bread of Life. And, in the deepest sense of all, it is His flesh broken

for us in His sacrifice on the Cross. That bread is a gift. So the

paradox results which stands in our text--work for the bread which God

will give. If it be a gift, that fact determines what sort of work must

be done in order to possess it. If it be a gift, then the only work is

to accept it. If it be a gift, then we are out of the region of quid

pro quo; and have not to bring, as Chinese do, great strings of copper

cash that, all added up together, do not amount to a shilling, in order

to buy what God will bestow upon us. If it be a gift, then to trust the

Giver and to accept the gift is the only condition that is possible.

It is not a condition that God has invented and arbitrarily imposed.

The necessity of it is lodged deep in the very nature of the case. Air

cannot get to the lungs of a mouse in an air-pump. Light cannot come

into a room where all the shutters are up and the keyhole stopped. If a

man chooses to perch himself on some little stool of his own, with

glass legs to it, and to take away his hand from the conductor, no

electricity will come to him. If I choose to lock my lips, Jesus Christ

does not prise open my clenched teeth to put the bread of life into my

unwilling mouth. If we ask, we get; if we take, we get.

And so the paradox comes, that we work for a gift, with a work which is

not work because it is a departure from myself. It is the same blessed

paradox which the prophet spoke when he said, Buy . . . without money

and without price.' Oh! what a burden of hopeless effort and weary

toil--like that of the man that had to roll the stone up the hill,

which ever slipped back again--is lifted from our shoulders by such a

word as this that I have been poorly trying to speak about now! Thou

art careful and troubled about many things,' poor soul! trying to be

good; trying to fight yourself, and the world, and the devil. Try the

other plan, and listen to Him saying, Give up self-imposed effort in

thine own strength. Take, eat, this is My body, which is broken for

you.'

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THE MANNA

I am that bread of life. 49. Your fathers did eat manna in the

wilderness, and are dead. 50. This is the bread which cometh down from

heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.'--JOHN vi. 48-50.

This is of a truth that Prophet,' said the Jews, when Christ had fed

the five thousand on the five barley loaves and the two small fishes.

That was the kind of Teacher for them; they were quite unaffected by

the wisdom of His words and the beauty of His deeds, but a miracle that

found food precisely met their wants, and so there was excited an

impure enthusiasm, very unwelcome to Jesus. Therefore He withdrew

Himself from it, and when the people followed Him, all full of

expectation, to get some more loaves and see some more miracles, He met

them with a douche of cold water that cooled their enthusiasm and flung

them back into a critical, questioning mood. They pointed to the

miracle of the manna, and hinted that, if He expected them to accept

Him, He must do as Moses had done, or something like it. Probably there

was a Jewish tradition in existence then to the effect that the Messiah

was to repeat the miracle of the manna. But, at all events, Christ lays

hold of the reference that they put into His hands, and He said in

effect, Manna? Yes; I give, and am, the true Manna.'

So this is the third of the instances in this Gospel in which our Lord

pointed to Old Testament incidents and institutions as symbolising

Himself. In the first of them, when He likened Himself to the ladder

that Jacob saw, He claimed to be the Medium of communication between

heaven and earth. In the second of them, when He likened Himself to the

brazen serpent lifted in the camp, He claimed to be the Healer of a

sin-stricken and poisoned world. And now, with an allusion both to the

miracle and to the Jewish demand for the repetition of the manna sign,

He claims to be the true Food for a starving world. So there are three

things in my text: Christ's claim, His requirements, and His promise;

the bread, the eating, the issues.

I. Here is a claim of Christ's.

As I have already said, in the whole wonderful conversation of which I

have selected a portion for my text, there is a double reference to the

miracle of the loaves and of the manna. What our Lord means to assert

for Himself is that which is common to both of these--viz. that He

supplies the great primal wants of humanity, the hunger of the heart.

There may be another reference also, which I just notice without

dwelling upon it. Barley loaves were the coarsest and least valuable

form of bread. They were not only of little worth, but altogether

inadequate to feeding the five thousand. The palates, unaccustomed to

the stinging savours of the garlic and the leeks of Egypt, loathed the

light bread. And so Jesus Christ comes into the world in lowly form,

like the barley loaf or the light bread from which men whose tastes

have been vitiated by the piquant savours of more earthly nourishment

turn away as insipid. And yet He in His lowliness, He in His

savourlessness, is that which meets the deepest wants of humanity, and

is every man's fare because He will be any man's satisfaction.

But I wish to bring before your notice the wonderful way in which our

Lord, in this great dissertation concerning Himself as the Bread of

Life, gradually unfolds the depths of His meaning and of His offer. He

began with saying that He, the Son of Man, will give to men the bread

that endures to everlasting life.' And then when that saying is but

dimly understood, and yet awakes some strange new desires and appetites

in the hearers, and they come to Him and ask, Lord, evermore give us

this bread,' He answers them with opening another finger of His hand,

as it were, and showing them a little more of the treasure that lies in

His palm. For He says, I am that Bread of Life.' That is an advance on

the previous saying. He gives bread, and any man that was conscious of

possessing some great truth or some great blessing which, believed and

accepted, would refresh and nourish humanity, might have said the same

thing. But now we pass into the penumbra of a greater mystery: I am

that Bread of Life.' You cannot separate what Christ gives from what

Christ is. You can take the truths that another man proclaims,

altogether irrespective of him and his personality. That only disturbs,

and the sooner it is got rid of, the firmer and the purer our

possession of the message for which he is only the medium. You can take

Plato's teaching and do as you like with Plato. But you cannot take

Christ's teaching and do as you like with Christ. His personality is

the centre of His gift to the world. I am that Bread of Life.' That He

should give it is much; that He should be it is far more.

And notice how, when He has thus drawn us a little further into the

magic circle of the light, He not only asserts the inseparableness of

His gift from His Person, but also asserts, with a reference, no doubt,

to the manna, I am the Bread that came down from heaven.' The listeners

immediately laid hold of that one point, and neglected for the moment

all the rest, and they fixed with a true instinct--although it was for

the purpose of contradicting it--on this central point, that came down

from heaven.' They said one to the other, How can this man say that He

came down from heaven? Is not this Jesus the Son of Joseph, whose

father and mother we know?' So, brethren, as the manna that descended

from above in the dew of the night was to the bread that was baked in a

baker's oven, so is the Christ to the manhood that has its origin in

the natural processes of birth. The Incarnation of the Son of God,

becoming Son of Man for us and for our salvation, is involved in this

great claim. You do not get to the heart of Christ's message unless you

have accepted this as the truth concerning Him, that in the beginning

was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,' and

that at a definite point in the long process of the ages, the Word

became flesh, and dwelt amongst us.' He will never be the Bread of

Life' unless He is the Bread that came down from heaven.' For humanity

needs that the blue heavens that bend remote above should come down;

and we cannot be lifted out of the horrible pit and the miry clay'

unless a Hand from above be reached down into the depths of our

degradation, and lift us from our lowness. Heaven must come to earth,

if earth is to rise to heaven. The ladder must be let down from above,

if ever from the lower levels men are to ascend thither where at the

summit the face of God can be seen.

But that is not all. Our Lord, if I may recur to a former figure, went

on to open another finger of His hand, and to show still more of the

gift. For He not only said, the Son of Man gives the bread,' and I am

the Bread that came down from heaven,' but He went on to say, in a

subsequent stage of the conversation, the Bread that I will give is My

flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' Now, notice that

will give.' Then, though the Word was made flesh, and the manna came

down from heaven, the especial gift of His flesh for the life of the

world was, at the time of His speaking, a future thing. And what He

meant is still more clearly brought out, when we read other words which

are the very climax of this conversation, when He declares that the

condition of our having life in ourselves is our eating the flesh and

drinking the blood of the Son of Man.' The figure is made repulsive on

purpose, in order that it may provoke us to penetrate to its meaning.

It was even more repulsive to the Jew, with his religious horror of

touching or tasting anything in which the blood was. And yet our Lord

not only speaks of Himself as the Bread, but of His flesh and blood as

being the Food of the world. The separation of the two clearly

indicates a violent death, and I, for my part, have no manner of doubt

that, in these great words in which our Lord lays bare the deepest

foundations of His claim to be the Food of humanity, there is couched,

in the veiled language which was necessary at the then stage of His

mission, a distinct reference to His death, as being the Sacrifice on

which a hunger-stricken world may feed and be satisfied.

So here we have, in three steps, the great central truth of the Gospel

set forth in symbolical aspect: the Son that gives, the Son that is,

the Bread of the world, and the death whereby His flesh and blood are

separated and become the nourishment of all sin-stricken souls. I do

not say one word to enforce these claims, but I beseech you deal fairly

with these Gospel narratives, and do not go on picking out of them bits

of Christ's actions or words, which commend themselves to you, and

ignoring all the rest. There is no more reason to believe that Jesus

Christ ever said, As ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so

to them likewise,' or any other part of that Sermon on the Mount which

some people take as their Christianity, than there is to believe that

He said, The bread which I give is My flesh, which I will give for the

life of the world.' Believe it or not, it is not dealing with the

Scripture records as you deal with other historical records if, for

subjective reasons, you brush aside all that department of our Lord's

teaching. And if you do accept it, what becomes of His sweet

reasonableness'? What becomes of His meekness and lowliness of heart? I

was going to say what becomes of His sanity, that He should stand up, a

youngish man from Nazareth, in the synagogue of Capernaum, and should

say, I, heaven-descended, and slain by men, am the Bread of Life to the

whole world'?

I was going to make another observation, which I must just pass with

the slightest notice, and that is that, taking this point of view and

giving full weight to these three stages of our Lord's progressive

revelation of Himself, we have the answer to the question, What is the

connection between these discourses and the ordinance of the Lord's

Supper? Our modern sacramentarian friends will have it that Jesus

Christ is speaking of the Communion in this chapter. I take it, and I

venture to think it the reasonable explanation, that He is not speaking

about the Communion, but that this discourse and that rite are dealing

with the same truths--the one in articulate words, the other in

equivalent symbols. And so we have not to read into the text any

allusion to the rite, but to see in the text and in the rite the

proclamation of the same thing--viz. that the flesh and the blood of

the Sacrifice for sins is the food on which a sinful and cleansed world

may feed.

II. So, secondly, let me ask you to note our Lord's requirement here.

He carries on the metaphor. This is the Bread which cometh down from

heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die.' The eating necessarily

follows from the symbol of the bread, as the designation of the way by

which we all, with our hungry hearts, may feed upon this Bread of God.

I need not remind you that in many a place, and in this whole context,

we find the explanation of the symbol very plainly. In another part of

this conversation we read, under another metaphor which comes to the

same thing, He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger, and he that

believeth on Me shall never thirst. So the eating and the coming are

diverse symbols for the one thing, the believing. When a man eats he

appropriates to himself, and incorporates into his very being, the food

of which he partakes. And when a man trusts Christ he appropriates to

himself, and incorporates into his inmost being, the very life of Jesus

Christ. You say, That is mysticism'; but it is the New Testament

teaching, that when I trust Christ I get more than His gifts--I get

Himself; that when my faith goes out to Him it not only rests me on

Him, but it brings Him into me, and that food of the spirit becomes the

life, as we shall see, of my spirit.

That condition is indispensable. It is useless to have food on your

table or your plate or in your hand, it does not nourish you there: you

must eat it, and then you gain sustenance from it. Many a hungry man

has died at the door of a granary. Some of us are starving, though

beside us there is the Bread of God that came down from heaven.'

Brethren, you must eat, and I venture to put the question to you--not

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the world's Saviour? not Do you

believe in an Incarnation? not Do you believe in an Atonement? but Have

you claimed your portion in the Bread? Have you taken it into your own

lips? Crede et manducasti, said Augustine, believe'--or, rather,

trust--and thou hast eaten.' Have you?

Further, let me remind you that under this eating is included not only

some initial act of faith, but a continuous course of partaking. The

dinner you ate this day last year is of no use for to-day's hunger. The

act of faith done long ago will not bring the Bread to nourish you now.

You must repeat the meal. And very strikingly and beautifully in the

last part of this conversation our Lord varies the word for eating, and

substitutes--as if He were speaking to those who had fulfilled the

previous condition--another one which implies the ruminant action of

certain animals. And that is what Christian men have to do, to feed

over and over and over again on the Bread of God which came down from

heaven.' Christ, and especially in and through His death for us, can

nourish and sustain our wills, giving them the pattern of what they

should desire, and the motive for which they should desire it. Christ,

and especially through His death, can feed our consciences, and take

away from them all the painful sense of guilt, while He sharpens them

to a far keener sensitiveness to evil. Christ, and especially through

His death, can feed our understandings, and unveil therein the deepest

truths concerning God and man, concerning man's destiny and God's

mercy. Christ, and especially in His death, can feed our affections,

and minister to love and desire and submission and hope their celestial

nourishment. He is the Bread of God,' and we have but to eat of that

which is laid before us.

III. So, lastly, we have here the issues.

Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.' This Bread

secures that if a man eat thereof he shall not die.' The bread that

perishes feeds a life that perishes; but this Bread not only sustains

but creates a life that cannot perish, and, taken into the spirits of

men that are dead in trespasses and sins,' imparts to them a life that

has no affinity to evil, and therefore no dread of extinction.

If a man eats thereof he shall not die,' Christ annihilates for us the

mere accident of physical death. That is only a momentary jolt on the

course. That may all be crammed into a parenthesis. He shall not die,'

but live the true life which comes from the possession of union with

Him who is the Life. The bread which we eat sustains life; the Bread

which He gives originates it. The bread which we eat is assimilated to

our bodily frame, the Bread which He gives assimilates our spiritual

nature to His. And so it comes to be the only food that stills a hungry

heart, the only food that satisfies and yet never cloys, which, eating,

we are filled, and being filled are made capable of more, and, being

capable of more, receive more. In blessed and eternal alternation,

fruition and desire, satisfaction and appetite, go on.

Why do ye spend money for that which is not bread?' You cannot answer

the question with any reasonable answer. Oh, dear friends! I beseech

you, listen to that Lord who is saying to each of us, Take, eat, this

is My body, which is broken for you.'

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ONE SAYING WITH TWO MEANINGS

Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I

go unto Him that sent Me. 34. Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find Me:

and where I am, thither ye cannot come.'--JOHN vii. 33, 34.

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me;

and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say

to you.'--JOHN xiii. 33.

No greater contrast can be conceived than that between these two groups

to whom such singularly similar words were addressed. The one consists

of the officers, tools of the Pharisees and of the priests, who had

been sent to seize Christ, and would fain have carried out their

masters' commission, but were restrained by a strange awe, inexplicable

even to themselves. The other consists of the little company of His

faithful, though slow, scholars, who made a great many mistakes, and

sometimes all but tired out even His patience, and yet were forgiven

much because they loved much. Hatred animated one group, loving sorrow

the other.

Christ speaks to them both in nearly the same words, but with what a

different tone, meaning, and application! To the officers the saying is

an exhibition of His triumphant confidence that their malice is

impotent and their arms paralysed; that when He wills He will go, not

be dragged by them or any man, but go to a safe asylum, where foes can

neither find nor follow. The officers do not understand what He means.

They think that, bad Jew as they have always believed Him to be, He may

very possibly consummate His apostasy by going over to the Gentiles

altogether; but, at any rate, they feel that He is to escape their

hands.

The disciples understand little more as to whither He goes, as they

themselves confess a moment after; but they gather from His words His

loving pity, and though the upper side of the saying seems to be

menacing and full of separation, there is an under side that suggests

the possibility of a reunion for them.

The words are nearly the same in both cases, but they are not

absolutely identical. There are significant omissions and additions in

the second form of them. Little children' is the tenderest of all the

names that ever came from Christ's lips to His disciples, and never was

heard on His lips except on this one occasion, for parting words ought

to be very loving words. A little while I am with you,' but He does not

say, And then I go to Him that sent Me.' Ye shall seek Me,' but He does

not say, And shall not find Me.' As I said unto the Jews, whither I go

ye cannot come, so now I say to you,' that little word now' makes the

announcement a truth for the present only. His disciples shall not seek

Him in vain, but when they seek they shall find. And though for a

moment they be parted from Him, it is with the prospect and the

confidence of reunion. Let us, then, look at the two main thoughts

here. First, the two seekings,' the seeking which is vain, and the

seeking which is never vain; and the two cannots,' the inability of His

enemies for evermore to come where He is, and the inability of His

friends, for a little season, to come where He is.

I. The two seekings.

As I have observed, there is a very significant omission in one of the

forms of the words. The enemies are told that they will never find Him,

but no such dark words are spoken to the friends. So, then, hostile

seeking of the Christ is in vain, and loving seeking of Him by His

friends, though they understand Him but very poorly, and therefore seek

Him that they may know Him better, is always answered and

over-answered.

Let me deal just for a moment or two with each of these. In their

simplest use the words of my first text merely mean this: You cannot

touch Me, I am passing into a safe asylum where your hands can never

reach Me.'

We may generalise that for a moment, though it does not lie directly in

our path, and preach the old blessed truth that no man with hostile

intent seeking for Christ in His person, in His Gospel, or in His

followers and friends, can ever find Him. All the antagonism that has

stormed against Him and His cause and words, and His followers and

lovers, has been impotent and vain. The pursuers are like dogs chasing

a bird, sniffing along the ground after their prey, which all the while

sits out of their reach on a bough, and carols to the sky. As in the

days of His flesh, His foes could not touch His person till He chose,

and vainly sought Him when it pleased Him to hide from them, so ever

since, in regard to His cause, and in regard to all hearts that love

Him, no weapon that is formed against them shall prosper. They shall be

wrapped, when need be, in a cloud of protecting darkness, and stand

safe within its shelter. Take good cheer, all you that are trying to do

anything, however little, however secular it may appear to be, for the

good and well-being of your fellows! All such service is a prolongation

of Christ's work, and an effluence from His, if there be any good in it

at all; and it is immortal and safe, as is His. Ye shall seek Me and

shall not find Me.'

But then, besides that, there is another thought. It is not merely

hostile seeking of Him that is hopeless vain. When the dark days came

over Israel, under the growing pressure of the Roman yoke, and amidst

the agonies of that last siege, and the unutterable sufferings which

all but annihilated the nation, do you not think that there were many

of these people who said to themselves: Ah! if we had only that Jesus

of Nazareth back with us for a day or two; if we had only listened to

Him!' Do you not think that before Israel dissolved in blood there were

many of those who had stood hostile or alienated, who desired to see

one of the days of the Son of Man,' and did not see it? They sought

Him, not in anger any more; they sought Him, not in penitence, or else

they would have found Him; but they sought Him simply in distress, and

wishing that they could have back again what they had cared so little

for when they had it.

And are there no people listening to me now, to whom these words

apply?--

He that will not, when he may,

When he will it shall be--Nay!'

Although it is (blessed be His name) always true that a seeking heart

finds Him, and whensoever there is the faintest trace of penitent

desire to get hold of Christ's hand it does grasp ours, it is also true

that things neglected once cannot be brought back; that the sowing time

allowed to pass can never return; and that they who have turned, as

some of you have turned, dear friends, all your lives, a deaf ear to

the Christ that asks you to love Him and trust Him, may one day wish

that it had been otherwise, and go to look for Him and not find Him.

There is another kind of seeking that is vain, an intellectual seeking

without the preparation of the heart. There are, no doubt, some people

here to-day that would say, We have been seeking the truth about

religion all our lives, and we have not got to it yet.' Well, I do not

want to judge either your motives or your methods, but I know this,

that there is many a man who goes on the quest for religious certainty,

and looks at, if not for Jesus Christ, and is not really capable of

discerning Him when he sees Him, because his eye is not single, or

because his heart is full of worldliness or indifference, or because he

begins with a foregone conclusion, and looks for facts to establish

that; or because he will not cast down and put away evil things that

rise up between him and his Master.

My brother! if you go to look for Jesus Christ with a heart full of the

world, if you go to look for Him while you wish to hold on by all the

habitudes and earthlinesses of your past, you will never find Him. The

sensualist seeks for Him, the covetous man seeks for Him, the

passionate, ill-tempered man seeks for Him; the woman plunged in

frivolities, or steeped to the eyebrows in domestic cares,--these may

in some feeble fashion go to look for Him and they will not find Him,

because they have sought for Him with hearts overcharged with other

things and filled with the affairs of this life, its trifles and its

sins.

I turn for a moment to the seeking that is not vain. Ye shall seek Me'

is not on Christ's lips to any heart that loves Him, however

imperfectly, a sentence of separation or an appointment of a sorrowful

lot, but it is a blessed law, the law of the Christian life.

That life is all one great seeking after Christ. Love seeks the absent

when removed from our sight. If we care anything about Him at all, our

hearts will turn to Him as naturally as, when the winter begins to

pinch, the migrating birds seek the sunny south, impelled by an

instinct that they do not themselves understand.

The same law which sends loving thoughts out across the globe to seek

for husband, child, or friend when absent, sets the really Christian

heart seeking for the Christ, whom, having not seen, it loves, as

surely as the ivy tendril feels out for a support. As surely as the

roots of a mountain-ash growing on the top of a boulder feel down the

side of the rock till they reach the soil; as surely as the stork

follows the warmth to the sunny Mediterranean, so surely, if your heart

loves Christ, will the very heart and motive of your action be the

search for Him.

And if you do not seek Him, brother, as surely as He is parted from our

sense you will lose Him, and He will be parted from you wholly, for

there is no way by which a person who is not before our eyes may be

kept near us except only by diligent effort on our part to keep thought

and love and will all in contact with Him; thought meditating, love

going out towards Him, will submitting. Unless there be this effort,

you will lose your Master as surely as a little child in a crowd will

lose his nurse and his guide, if his hand slips from out the protecting

hand. The dark shadow of the earth on which you stand will slowly steal

over His silvery brightness, as when the moon is eclipsed, and you will

not know how you have lost Him, but only be sadly aware that your

heaven is darkened. Ye shall seek Me,' is the condition of all happy

communion between Christ and us.

And that seeking, dear brother, in the threefold form in which I have

spoken of it--effort to keep Him in our thoughts, in our love, and over

our will--is neither a seeking which starts from a sense that we do not

possess Him, nor one which ends in disappointment. But we seek for Him

because we already have Him in a measure, and we seek Him that we may

possess Him more abundantly, and anything is possible rather than that

such a search shall be vain. Men may go to created wells, and find no

water, and return ashamed, and with their vessels empty, but every one

who seeks for that Fountain of salvation shall draw from it with joy.

It is as impossible that a heart which desires Jesus Christ shall not

have Him, as it is that lungs dilated shall not fill with air, or as it

is that an empty vessel put out in a rainfall shall not be replenished.

He does not hide Himself, but He desires to be found. May I say that as

a mother will sometimes pretend to her child to hide, that the child's

delight may be the greater in searching and in finding, so Christ has

gone away from our sight in order, for one reason, that He may

stimulate our desires to feel after Him! If we seek Him hid in God, we

shall find Him for the joy of our hearts.

A great thinker once said that he would rather have the search after

truth than the possession of truth. It was a rash word, but it pointed

to the fact that there is a search which is only one shade less blessed

than the possession. And if that be so in regard to any pure and high

truth, it is still more so about Christ Himself. To seek for Him is

joy; to find Him is joy. What can be a happier life than the life of

constant pursuit after an infinitely precious object, which is ever

being sought and ever being found; sought with a profound consciousness

of its preciousness, found with a widening appreciation and capacity

for its enjoyment? Ye shall seek Me' is a word not of evil but of good

cheer; for buried in the depth of the commandment to search is the

promise that we shall find.

II, Secondly, let us look briefly at these two cannots.'

Whither I go, ye cannot come,' says He to His enemies, with no

limitation, with no condition. The cannot' is absolute and permanent,

so long as they retain their enmity. To His friends, on the other hand,

He says, So now I say to you,' the law for to-day, the law for this

side the flood, but not the law for the beyond, as He explains more

fully in the subsequent words: Thou canst not follow Me now, but thou

shalt follow Me afterwards.'

So, then, Christ is somewhere. When He passed from life it was not into

a state only, but into a place; and He took with Him a material body,

howsoever changed. He is somewhere, and there friend and enemy alike

cannot enter, so long as they are compassed with the earthly house of

this tabernacle.' But the incapacity is deeper than that. No sinful man

can pass thither. Where has He gone? The preceding words give us the

answer. God shall glorify Him in Himself.' The prospect of that

assumption into the inmost glory of the divine nature directly led our

Lord to think of the change it would bring about in the relation of His

humble friends to Him. While for Himself He triumphs in the prospect,

He cannot but turn a thought to their lonesomeness, and hence come the

words of our text. He has passed into the bosom and blaze of divinity.

Can I walk there, can I pass into that tremendous fiery furnace? Who

shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?' Ye cannot follow Me now.'

No man can go thither except Christ goes thither.

There are deep mysteries lying in that word of our Lords,--I go to

prepare a place for you.' We know not what manner of activity on His

part that definitely means. It seems as if somehow or other the

presence in Heaven of our Brother in His glorified humanity was

necessary in order that the golden pavement should be trodden by our

feet, and that our poor, feeble manhood should live and not be

shrivelled up in the blaze of that central brightness.

We know not how He prepares the place, but heaven, whatever it be, is

no place for a man unless the Man, Christ Jesus, be there. He is the

Revealer of God, not only for earth, but for heaven; not only for time,

but for eternity. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me,' is true

everywhere and always, there as here. So I suppose that, but for His

presence, heaven itself would be dark, and its King invisible, and if a

man could enter there he would either be blasted with unbearable

flashes of brightness or grope at its noonday as the blind, because his

eye was not adapted to such beams. Be that as it may, the Forerunner is

for us entered.' He has gone before, because He knows the great City,

His own calm home, His habitation from eternity.' He has gone before to

make ready a lodging for us, in whose land He has dwelt so long, and He

will meet us, who would else be bewildered like some dweller in a

desert if brought to the capital, when we reach the gates, and guide

our unaccustomed steps to the mansion prepared for us.

But the power to enter there, even when He is there, depends on our

union with Christ by faith. When we are joined to Him, the absolute

cannot,' based upon flesh, and still more upon sin, which is a radical

and permanent impossibility, is changed into a relative and temporary

incapacity. If we have faith in Christ, and are thereby drawing a

kindred life from Him, our nature will be in process of being changed

into that which is capable of bearing the brilliance of the felicities

of heaven. But just as these friends of Christ, though they loved Him

very truly, and understood Him a little, were a long way from being

ready to follow Him, and needed the schooling of the Cross, and Olivet,

and Pentecost, as well as the discipline of life and toil, before they

were fully ripe for the harvest, so we, for the most part, have to pass

through analogous training before we are prepared for the place which

Christ has prepared for us. Certainly, so soon as a heart has trusted

Christ, it is capable of entering where He is, and the real reason why

the disciples could not come where He went was that they did not yet

clearly know Him as the divine Sacrifice for theirs and the world's

sins, and, however much they believed in Him as Messiah, had not yet,

nor could have, the knowledge on which they could found their trust in

Him as their Saviour.

But, while that is true, it is also true that each advance in the grace

and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour will bring with it capacity to

advance further into the heart of the far-off land, and to see more of

the King in His beauty. So, as long as His friends were wrapped in such

dark clouds of misconception and error, as long as their Christian

characters were so imperfect and incomplete as they were at the time of

my text being spoken, they could not go thither and follow Him. But it

was a diminishing impossibility, and day by day they approximated more

and more to His likeness, because they understood Him more, and trusted

Him more, and loved Him more, and grew towards Him, and, therefore, day

by day became more and more able to enter into that Kingdom.

Are you growing in power so to do? Is the only thing which unfits you

for heaven the fact that you have a mortal body? In other respects are

you fit to go into that heaven, and walk in its brightness and not be

consumed? The answer to the question is found in another one--Are you

joined to Jesus Christ by simple faith? The incapacity is absolute and

eternal if the enmity is eternal.

State and place are determined yonder by character, and character is

determined by faith. Take a bottle of some solution in which

heterogeneous substances have all been melted up together, and let it

stand on a shelf and gradually settle down, and its contents will

settle in regular layers, the heaviest at the bottom and the lightest

at the top, and stratify themselves according to gravity. And that is

how the other world is arranged--stratified. When all the confusions of

this present are at an end, and all the moisture is driven off, men and

women will be left in layers, like drawing to like. As Peter said about

Judas with equal wisdom and reticence, He went to his own place.' That

is where we shall all go, to the place we are fit for.

God does not slam the door of heaven in anybody's face; it stands wide

open. But there is a mystic barrier, unseen, but most real, more

repellent than cherub and flaming sword, which makes it impossible for

any foot to cross that threshold except the foot of the man whose heart

and nature have been made Christlike, and fitted for heaven by simple

faith in Him.

Love Him and trust Him, and then your life on earth will be a blessed

seeking and a blessed finding of Him whom to seek is joyous effort,

whom to find is an Elysium of rest. You will walk here not parted from

Him, but with your thoughts and your love, which are your truest self,

going up where He is, until you drop the muddy vesture of decay' which

unfits you whilst you wear it for the presence-chamber of the King, and

so you will enter in and be for ever with the Lord.'

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THE ROCK AND THE WATER

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried,

saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. 38. He that

believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall

flow rivers of living water.'--JOHN vii. 37, 38.

The occasion and date of this great saying are carefully given by the

Evangelist, because they throw much light on its significance and

importance. It was on the last day, that great day of the Feast,' that

Jesus stood and cried.' The Feast was that of Tabernacles, which was

instituted in order to keep in mind the incidents of the desert

wandering. On the anniversary of this day the Jews still do as they

used to, and in many a foul ghetto and frowsy back street of European

cities, you will find them sitting beneath the booths of green

branches, commemorating the Exodus and its wonders. Part of that

ceremonial was that on each morning of the seven, and possibly on the

eighth, the last day of the Feast,' a procession of white-robed priests

wound down the rocky footpath from the Temple to Siloam, and there in a

golden vase drew water from the spring, chanting, as they ascended and

re-entered the Temple gates where they poured out the water as a

libation, the words of the prophet, with joy shall ye draw water out of

the wells of salvation.'

Picture the scene to yourselves--the white-robed priests toiling up the

pathway, the crowd in the court, the sparkling water poured out with

choral song. And then, as the priests stood with their empty vases,

there was a little stir in the crowd, and a Man who had been standing

watching, lifted up a loud voice and cried, If any man thirst, let him

come unto Me, and drink.' Strange words to say, anywhere and anywhen,

daring words to say there in the Temple court! For there and then they

could mean nothing less than Christ's laying His hand on that old

miracle, which was pointed to by the rite, when the rock yielded the

water, and asserting that all which it did and typified was repeated,

fulfilled, and transcended in Himself, and that not for a handful of

nomads in the wilderness, but for all the world, in all its

generations.

So here is one more instance to add to those to which I have directed

your attention on former occasions, in which, in this Gospel, we find

Christ claiming to be the fulfilment of incidents and events in that

ancient covenant, Jacob's ladder, the brazen serpent, the manna, and

now the rock that yielded the water. He says of them all that they are

the shadow, and the substance is in Him.

I. So then, we have to look, first, at Christ's view of humanity as set

forth here.

You remember the story of how the people in the wilderness, distressed

by that most imperative of all physical cravings, thirst, turned upon

Moses and Aaron and said, Why have ye brought us here to die in the

wilderness, where there are neither vines nor pomegranates,' but a land

of thirst and death? Just as Christ, in the former instances to which

we have already referred, selected and pointed to the poisoned and

serpent-stricken camp as an emblem of humanity, and just as He pointed

to the hunger of the men that were starving there, as an emblem, go

here He says: That is the world--a congregation of thirsty men raging

in their pangs, and not knowing where to find solace or slaking for

their thirst.' I do not need to go over all the dominant desires that

surge up in men's souls, the mind craving for knowledge, the heart

calling out for love, the whole nature feeling blindly and often

desperately after something external to itself, which it can grasp, and

in which it can feel satisfied. You know them; we all know them. Like

some plant growing in a cellar, and with feeble and blanched tendrils

feeling towards the light which is so far away, every man carries about

within himself a whole host of longing desires, which need to find

something round which they may twine, and in which they can be at rest.

The misery of man is great upon him,' because, having these desires, he

misreads so many of them, and stifles, ignores, atrophies to so large

an extent the noblest of them. I know of no sadder tragedy than the way

in which we misinterpret the meaning of these inarticulate cries that

rise from the depths of our hearts, and misunderstand what it is that

we are groping after, when we put out empty, and, alas! too often

unclean, hands, to lay hold on our true good.

Brethren, you do not know what you want, many of you, and there is

something pathetic in the endless effort to fill up the heart by a

multitude of diverse and small things, when all the while the deepest

meaning of aspirations, yearnings, longings, unrest, discontent is, My

soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.' Nothing less than

infinitude will satisfy the smallest heart of the humblest and least

developed man. Nothing less than to have all our treasures in one

accessible, changeless Infinity will ever give rest to a human soul.

You have tried a multiplicity of trifles. It takes a great many bags of

coppers to make up L. 1000, and they are cumbrous to carry. Would it

not be better to part with a multitude of goodly pearls, if need be, in

order to have all your wealth, and the satisfaction of all your

desires, in the One Pearl of great price'? It is God for whom men are

thirsting, and, alas! so many of us know it not. As the old prophet

says, in words that never lose their pathetic power, they have hewn out

for themselves cisterns'--one is not enough--they need many. They are

only cisterns, which hold what is put into them, and they are broken

cisterns,' which cannot hold it. Yet we turn to these with a strange

infatuation, which even the experience that teaches fools does not

teach us to be folly. We turn to these; and we turn from the Fountain;

the one, the springing, the sufficient, the unfailing, the exuberant

Fountain of living waters. Some of you have cisterns on the tops of

your houses, with a coating of green scum and soot on them, and do you

like that foul draught better than the bright blessing that comes out

of the heart of the rock, flashing and pure?

But not only are these desires misread, but the noblest of them are

stifled. I have said that the condition of humanity is that of thirst.

Christ speaks in my text as if that thirst was by no means universal,

and, alas! it is not, If any man thirst'; there are some of us that do

not, for we are all so constituted that, unless by continual

self-discipline, and self-suppression, and self-evolution, the lower

desires will overgrow the loftier ones, and kill them, as weeds will

some precious crop. And some of you are so much taken up with

gratifying the lowest necessities and longings of your nature, that you

leave the highest all uncared for, and the effect of that is that the

unsatisfied longing avenges itself, for your neglect of it, by infusing

unrest and dissatisfaction into what else would satisfy the lowest. He

that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that

loveth abundance with increase,' but he that loves God will be

satisfied with less than silver, and will continue satisfied when

decrease comes. If you would suck the last drop of sweetness out of the

luscious purple grapes that grow on earth, you must have the appetite

after the best things, recognised, and ministered to, and satisfied.

And when we are satisfied with God, we shall have learnt in whatsoever

state we are, therewith to be self-sufficing.' But, as I say, the

highest desires are neglected, and the lowest are cockered and

pampered, and so the taste is depraved. Many of you have no wish for

God, and no desire after high and noble things, and are perfectly

contented to browse on the low levels, or to feed on the husks that the

swine do eat,' whilst all the while the loftiest of your powers is

starving within. Brethren, before we can come to the Rock that yields

the water, there must be the sense of need. Do you know what it is that

you want? Have you any desire after righteousness and purity and

nobleness, and the vision of God flaming in upon the pettinesses and

commonplaces of this life which is sound and fury, signifying nothing,'

and is trivial in all its pretended greatness, unless you have learned

that you need God most of all, and will never be at rest till you have

Him?

II. Secondly, note here Christ's consciousness of Himself.

Is there anything in human utterances more majestic and wonderful than

this saying of my text, If any man thirst, let him come to Me'? There

He claims to be separate altogether from those whose thirst He would

satisfy. There He claims to be able to meet every aspiration, every

spiritual want, every true desire in this complex nature of ours. There

He claims to be able to do this for one, and therefore for all. There

He claims to be able to do it for all the generations of mankind, right

away down to the end. Who is He who thus plants Himself in the front of

the race, knows their deep thirsts, takes account of the impotence of

anything created to satisfy them, assumes the divine prerogative, and

says, I come to satisfy every desire in every soul, to the end of

time'? Yes, and from that day when He stood in the Temple and cried

these words, down to this day, there have been, and there are, millions

who can say, We have drawn water from this fountain of salvation, and

it has never failed us.' Christ's audacious presentation of Himself to

the world as adequate to fill all its needs, and slake all its thirst,

has been verified by nineteen centuries of experience, and there are

many men and women all over the world to-day who would be ready to set

to their seals that Christ is true, and that He, indeed, is

all-sufficient for the soul.

Brethren, I do not wish to dwell upon this aspect of our Lord's

character in more than a sentence, but I beseech you to ask yourselves

what is the impression that is left of the character of a man who says

such things, unless He was something more than one of our race? Jesus

Christ, it is as clear as day, in these words makes a claim which only

divinity can warrant Him in making, or can fulfil when it is made. And

I would urge you to consider what the alternative is, if you do not

believe that Jesus Christ here sets Himself forth as the Incarnate Word

of God, sufficient for all humanity. I am meek and lowly in heart'--and

His lowliness of heart is proved in a strange fashion, if He stands up

before the race and says, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and

drink.'

III. Note, further, Christ's invitation.

Let him come . . . and drink'--two expressions for one thing. That

invitation sounds all through Scripture, and, perhaps, there was

lingering in our Lord's mind, besides the reference to the rock that

yielded the water, some echo of the words of the second Isaiah: Ho!

every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.' Nay!' said Christ,

not to the waters, but to Me.' And then we hear from His own lips the

same invitation addressed to the woman of Samaria, with the difference

that to her, an alien, He pointed only to the natural water in the well

that had been Jacob's, whereas, to these people, the descendants of the

chosen race, He pointed to the miracle in the desert, and claimed to

fulfil that. And on the very last page of Scripture, as it is now

arranged, there stands the echo again of this saying of my text, Let

him that is athirst come'--there must be the sense of need, as I was

saying, before there is the coming--and whosoever will, let him take of

the water of life freely.'

Now, dear friends, beneath these two metaphorical expressions there

lies one simple condition. I put it into three words, which, for the

sake of being easily remembered, I cast into an alliterative form:

approach Christ, appropriate Christ, adhere to Christ.

Approach Christ. You come by faith, you come by love, you come by

communion. And you can come if you will, though He is now on the

throne.

Appropriate Christ. It is vain that the water should be gushing from

the rock there, unless you make it your own by drinking. It must pass

your lips. It must become your personal possession. You must enclose a

piece of the common, and make it your very own. He loved us, and gave

Himself for us'; well and good, but strike out the us' and put in me.'

He loved me and gave Himself for me.' The river may be flowing right

past your door, yet your lips may be cracked with thirst, even whilst

you hear the tinkle of its music amongst the sedges and the pebbles.

Appropriate Christ. Come . . . and drink.'

Adhere to Christ. You were thirsty yesterday: you drank. That will not

slake to-day's thirst, nor prevent its recurrence. And you must keep on

drinking if you are to keep from perishing of thirst. Day by day, drop

by drop, draught by draught, you must drink. According to the ancient

Jewish legend, which Paul in one of his letters refers to, about this

very miracle, you must have the Rock following you all through your

desert pilgrimage, and you must drink daily and hourly, by continual

faith, love, and communion.

IV. We have here not only these points, but a fourth. Christ's promise.

He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living

water.' That is one case of the universal law that a man who trusts

Christ becomes like the Christ whom he trusts. Derivatively and by

impartation, no doubt, but still the man who has gone to that Rock, to

the springing fountain as it pushes forth, receives into himself an

inward life by the communication of Christ's divine Spirit, so that he

has in him a fountain springing up into life everlasting.' The Book of

Proverbs says, The good man shall be satisfied from himself,' but the

good man is only satisfied from himself when he can say, I live, yet

not I, but Christ liveth in me,' and from that better self he will be

satisfied.

So we may have a well in the courtyard, and may be able to bear in

ourselves the fountain of water, and where the divine life of Christ by

His Spirit has through faith been implanted within us, it will come out

from us. There is a question for you Christian people--do any rivers of

living water flow out of you? If they do not, it is to be doubted

whether you have drunk of the fountain. There are many professing

Christians who are like the foul little rivers that pass under the

pavements in Manchester, all impure, and covered over so that nobody

sees them. Out of him shall flow rivers of living water'--that is

Christ's way of communicating the blessing of eternal life to the

world--by the medium of those who have already received it. Christian

men and women, if your faith has brought the life into you, see to it

that approaching Christ, and appropriating Christ, and adhering to

Christ, you are becoming assimilated to Christ, and in your daily life,

God's grace fructifying through you to all, are become as rivers of

water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.'

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THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

. . . I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk

in darkness, but shall have the light of life.'--JOHN viii. 12.

Jesus Christ was His own great theme. Whatever be the explanation of

the fact, there stands the fact that, if we know anything at all about

His habitual tone of teaching, we know that it was full of Himself. We

know, too, that what He said about Himself was very unlike the language

becoming a wise and humble religious teacher. Both the prominence given

to His own personality, and the tremendous claims He advances for

Himself, are hard to reconcile with any conception of His nature and

work except one,--that there we see God manifest in the flesh. Are such

words as these fit to be spoken by any man conscious of his own

limitations and imperfections of life and knowledge? Would they not be

fatal to any one's pretensions to be a teacher of religion or morality?

They assert that the Speaker is the Source of illumination for the

world; the only Source; the Source for all. They assert that following'

Him, whether in belief or in deed, is the sure deliverance from all

darkness, either of error or of sin; and implants in every follower a

light which is life. And the world, instead of turning away from such

monstrous assumptions, and drowning them in scornful laughter, or

rebelling against them, has listened, and largely believed, and has not

felt them to mar the beauty of meekness, which, by a strange anomaly,

this Man says that He has.

Words parallel to these are frequent on our Lord's lips. In each

instance they have some special appropriateness of application, as is

probably the case here. The suggestion has been reasonably made, that

there is an allusion in them to part of the ceremonial connected with

the Feast of Tabernacles, at which we find our Lord present in the

previous chapter. Commentators tell us that on the first evening of the

Feast, two huge golden lamps, which stood one on each side of the altar

of burnt offering in the Temple court, were lighted as the night began

to fall, and poured out a brilliant flood over Temple and city and deep

gorge; while far into the midnight, troops of rejoicing worshippers

clustered about them with dance and song. The possibility of this

reference is strengthened by the note of place which our Evangelist

gives. These things spake Jesus in the treasury, as He taught in the

Temple,' for the treasury' stood in the same court, and doubtless the

golden lamps were full in sight of the listening groups. It is also

strengthened by the unmistakable allusion in the previous chapter to

another portion of the ceremonial of the Feast, where our Lord puts

forth another of His great self-revelations and demands, in singular

parallelism with that of our text, in the words, If any man thirst, let

him come unto Me and drink.' That refers to the custom during the Feast

of drawing water from the fountain of Siloam, which was poured out on

the altar, while the gathered multitude chanted the old strain of

Isaiah's prophecy: With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of

salvation.' It is to be remembered, too, in estimating the probability

of our text belonging to these Temple-sayings at the Feast, that the

section which separates it from them, and contains the story about the

woman taken in adultery, is judged by the best critics to be out of

place here, and is not found in the most valuable manuscripts. If,

then, we suppose this allusion to be fairly probable, I think it gives

a special direction and meaning to these grand words, which it may be

worth while to think of briefly.

The first thing to notice is--the intention of the ceremonial to which

our Lord here points as a symbol of Himself. What was the meaning of

these great lights that went flashing through the warm autumn nights of

the festival? All the parts of that Feast were intended to recall some

feature of the forty years' wanderings in the wilderness; the lights by

the altar were memorials of the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by

night. When, then, Jesus says, I am the Light of the world,' He would

declare Himself as being in reality, and to every soul of man to the

end of time, what that cloud with its heart of fire was in outward

seeming to one generation of desert wanderers.

Now, the main thing which it was to these, was the visible vehicle of

the divine presence. The Lord went before them in a pillar of a cloud.'

The Lord looked through the pillar.' The Lord came down in the cloud

and spake with him.' The cloud covered the Tabernacle, and the glory of

the Lord appeared.' Such is the way in which it is ever spoken of, as

being the manifestation to Israel in sensible form of the presence

among them of God their King. The glory of the Lord' has a very

specific meaning in the Old Testament. It usually signifies that

brightness, the flaming heart of the cloudy pillar, which for the most

part, as it would appear, veiled by the cloud, gathered radiance as the

world grew darker at set of sun, and sometimes, at great crises in the

history, as at the Red Sea, or on Sinai, or in loving communion with

the law-giver, or in swift judgment against the rebels, rent the veil

and flamed on men's eyes. I need not remind you how this same pillar of

cloud and fire, which at once manifested and hid God, was thereby no

unworthy symbol of Him who remains, after all revelation, unrevealed.

Whatsoever sets forth, must also shroud, the infinite glory. Concerning

all by which He makes Himself known to eye, or mind, or heart, it must

be said, And there was the hiding of His power.' The fire is ever

folded in the cloud. Nay, at bottom, the light which is full of glory

is therefore inaccessible, and the thick darkness in which He dwells is

but the glorious privacy' of perfect light.

That guiding pillar, which moved before the moving people--a cloud to

shelter from the scorching heat, a fire to cheer in the blackness of

night--spread itself above the sanctuary of the wilderness; and the

glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.' When the moving Tabernacle

gave place to the fixed Temple, again the cloud filled the house of the

Lord'; and there--dwelling between the cherubim, the types of the whole

order of creatural life, and above the mercy-seat, that spoke of

pardon, and the ark that held the law, and behind the veil, in the

thick darkness of the holy of holies, where no feet trod, save once a

year one white-robed priest, in the garb of a penitent, and bearing the

blood that made atonement--shone the light of the glory of God, the

visible majesty of the present Deity.

But long centuries had passed since that light had departed. The glory'

had ceased from the house that now stood on Zion, and the light from

between the cherubim. Shall we not, then, see a deep meaning and

reference to that awful blank, when Jesus standing there in the courts

of that Temple, whose inmost shrine was, in a most sad sense, empty,

pointed to the quenched lamps that commemorated a departed Shechinah,

and said, I am the Light of the world'?

He is the Light of the world, because in Him is the glory of God. His

words are madness, and something very like blasphemy, unless they are

vindicated by the visible indwelling in Him of the present God. The

cloud of the humanity, the veil, that is to say, His flesh,' enfolds

and tempers; and through its transparent folds reveals, even while it

swathes, the Godhead. Like some fleecy vapour flitting across the sun,

and irradiated by its light, it enables our weak eyes to see light, and

not darkness, in the else intolerable blaze. Yes! Thou art the Light of

the world, because in Thee dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily.'

Thy servant hath taught us the meaning of Thy words, when he said: 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.'

Then, subordinate to this principal thought, is the other on which I

may touch for a moment--that Christ, like that pillar of cloud and

fire, guides us in our pilgrimage. You may remember how emphatically

the Book of Numbers (chap. ix.) dwells upon the absolute control of all

the marches and halts by the movements of the cloud. When it was taken

up, they journeyed; when it settled down, they encamped. As long as it

lay spread above the Tabernacle, there they stayed. Impatient eyes

might look, and impatient spirits chafe--no matter. The camp might be

pitched in a desolate place, away from wells and palm-trees, away from

shade, among fiery serpents, and open to fierce foes--no matter. As

long as the pillar was motionless, no man stirred. Weary slow days

might pass in this compulsory inactivity; but whether it were two days,

or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the Tabernacle, the

children of Israel journeyed not.' And whenever It lifted itself

up,--no matter how short had been the halt, how weary and footsore the

people, how pleasant the resting-place--up with the tent-pegs

immediately, and away. If the signal were given at midnight, when all

but the watchers slept, or at midday, it was all the same. There was

the true Commander of their march. It was not Moses, nor Jethro, with

his quick Arab eye and knowledge of the ground, that guided them; but

that stately, solemn pillar, that floated before them. How they must

have watched for the gathering up of its folds as they lay softly

stretched along the Tabernacle roof; and for its sinking down, and

spreading itself out, like a misty hand of blessing, as it sailed in

the van!

I am the Light of the world.' We have in Him a better guide through

worse perplexities than theirs. By His Spirit within us, by that

all-sufficient and perfect example of His life, by the word of His

Gospel, and by the manifold indications of His providence, Jesus Christ

is our Guide. If ever we go astray, it is not His fault, but ours. How

gentle and loving that guidance is, none who have not yielded to it can

tell. How wise and sure, none but those who have followed it know. He

does not say Go,' but Come.' When He puts forth His sheep, He goes

before them. In all rough places His quick hand is put out to save us.

In danger He lashes us to Himself, as Alpine guides do when there is

perilous ice to get across. As one of the psalms puts it, with

wonderful beauty: I will guide thee with Mine eye'--a glance, not a

blow--a look of directing love, that at once heartens to duty and tells

duty. We must be very near Him to catch that look, and very much in

sympathy with Him to understand it; and when we do, we must be swift to

obey. Our eyes must be ever toward the Lord, or we shall often be

marching on, unwitting that the pillar has spread itself for rest, or

idly dawdling in our tents long after the cloud has gathered itself up

for the march. Do not let impatience lead you to hasty interpretation

of His plans before they are fairly evolved. Many men by self-will, by

rashness, by precipitate hurry in drawing conclusions about what they

ought to do, have ruined their lives. Take care, in the old-fashioned

phrase, of running before you are sent.' There should always be a good

clear space between the guiding ark and you, about two thousand cubits

by measure,' that there may be no mistakes about the road. It is

neither reverent nor wise to be treading on the heels of our Guide in

our eager confidence that we know where He wants us to go.

Do not let the warmth by the camp-fire, or the pleasantness of the

shady place where your tent is pitched, keep you there when the cloud

lifts. Be ready for change, be ready for continuance, because you are

in fellowship with your Leader and Commander; and let Him say, Go, and

you go; Do this, and you gladly do it, until the hour when He will

whisper, Come; and, as you come, the river will part, and the journey

will be over, and the fiery, cloudy pillar,' that guided you all your

journey through,' will spread itself out an abiding glory, in that

higher home where the Lamb is the light thereof.'

All true following of Christ begins with faith, or we might almost say

that following is faith, for we find our Lord substituting the former

expression for the latter in another passage of this Gospel parallel

with the present. I am come a Light into the world, that whosoever

believeth on Me should not walk in darkness.' The two ideas are not

equivalent, but faith is the condition of following; and following is

the outcome and test, because it is the operation, of faith. None but

they who trust Him will follow Him. He who does not follow, does not

trust. To follow Christ, means to long and strive after His

companionship; as the Psalmist says, My soul followeth hard after

Thee.' It means the submission of the will, the effort of the whole

nature, the daily conflict to reproduce His example, the resolute

adoption of His command as my law, His providence as my will, His

fellowship as my joy. And the root and beginning of all such following

is in coming to Him, conscious of mine own darkness, and trustful in

His great light. We must rely on a Guide before we accept His

directions; and it is absurd to pretend that we trust Him, if we do not

go as He bids us. So Follow thou Me' is, in a very real sense, the sum

of all Christian duty.

That thought opens out very wide fields, into which we must not even

glance now; but I cannot help pausing here to repeat the remark already

made, as to the gigantic and incomprehensible self-confidence that

speaks here. Followeth Me'; then Jesus Christ calmly proposes Himself

as the aim and goal for every soul of man; sets up His own doings as an

all-sufficient rule for us all, with all our varieties of temper,

character, culture, and work, and quietly assumes to have a right of

precedence before, and of absolute command over, the whole world. They

are all to keep behind Him, He thinks, be they saints or sages, kings

or beggars; and the liker they are to Himself, He thinks, the nearer

they will be to perfectness and life. He puts Himself at the head of

the mystic march of the generations, and, like the mysterious Angel

that Joshua saw in the plain by Jericho, makes the lofty claim: Nay,

but as Captain of the Lord's host am I come up.' Do we admit His claim

because we know His Name? Do we yield Him full trust because we have

learned that He is the Light of men since He is the Word of God? Do we

follow Him with loyal obedience, longing love, and lowly imitation,

since He has been and is to us the Saviour of our souls?

In the measure in which we do, the great promises of this wonderful

saying will be verified and understood by us--He that followeth Me

shall not walk in darkness.' That saying has, as one may say, a lower

and a higher fulfilment. In the lower, it refers to practical life and

its perplexities. Nobody who has not tried it would believe how many

difficulties are cleared out of a man's road by the simple act of

trying to follow Christ. No doubt there will still remain obscurities

enough as to what we ought to do, to call for the best exercise of

patient wisdom; but an enormous proportion of them vanish like mist

when the sun breaks through, when once we honestly set ourselves to

find out whither the pillared Light is guiding. It is a reluctant will,

and intrusive likings and dislikings, that obscure the way for us, much

oftener than real obscurity in the way itself. It is seldom impossible

to discern the divine will, when we only wish to know it that we may do

it. And if ever it is impossible for us, surely that impossibility is

like the cloud resting on the Tabernacle--a sign that for the present

His will is that we should be still, and wait, and watch.

But there is a higher meaning in the words than even this promise of

practical direction. In the profound symbolism of Scripture, especially

of this Gospel, darkness' is the name for the whole condition of the

soul averted from God. So our Lord here is declaring that to follow Him

is the true deliverance from that midnight of the soul. There are a

darkness of ignorance, a darkness of impurity, a darkness of sorrow;

and in that threefold gloom, thickening to a darkness of death, are

they enwrapt who follow not the Light. That is the grim, tragical side

of this saying, too sad, too awful for our lips to speak much of, and

best left in the solemn impressiveness of that one word. But the

hopeful, blessed side of it is, that the feeblest beginnings of trust

in Jesus Christ, and the first tottering steps that try to tread in

His, bring us into the light. It does not need that we have reached our

goal, it is enough that our faces are turned to it, and our hearts

desire to attain it, then we may be sure that the dominion of the

darkness over us is broken. To follow, though it be afar off, and with

unequal steps, fills our path with increasing brightness, and even

though evil and ignorance and sorrow may thrust their blackness in upon

our day, they are melting in the growing glory, and already we may give

thanks unto the Father who hath made us meet to be partakers of the

inheritance of the saints in light, who hath delivered us from the

power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear

Son.'

But we have not merely the promise that we shall be led by the light

and brought into the light. A yet deeper and grander gift is offered

here: He shall have the light of life.' I suppose that means, not, as

it is often carelessly taken to mean, a light which illuminates the

life, but, like the similar phrases of this Gospel, bread of life,'

water of life,'--light which is life. In Him was life, and the life was

the light of men.' These two are one in their source, which is Jesus,

the Word of God. Of Him we have to say, With Thee is the fountain of

life, in Thy light shall we see light.' They are one in their deepest

nature; the life is the light, and the light the life. And this one

gift is bestowed upon every soul that follows Christ. Not only will our

outward lives be illumined or guided from without, but our inward being

will be filled with the brightness. Ye were sometimes darkness, now are

ye light in the Lord.'

That pillar of fire remained apart and without. But this true and

better Guide of our souls enters in and dwells in us, in all the

fulness of His triple gift of life, and light, and love. Within us He

will chiefly prove Himself the Guide of our spirits, and will not

merely cast His beams on the path of our feet, but will fill and flood

us with His own brightness. All light of knowledge, of goodness, of

gladness will be ours, if Christ be ours; and ours He surely will be if

we follow Him. Let us take heed, lest turning away from Him we follow

the will-o'-the-wisps of our own fancies, or the dancing lights, born

of putrescence, that flicker above the swamps, for they will lead us

into doleful lands where evil things haunt, and into outer darkness.

Let us take heed how we use that light of God; for Christ, like His

symbol of old, has a double aspect according to the eye which looks. It

came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel, and it

was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these.'

He is either a Stone of stumbling or a sure Foundation, a savour of

life or of death, and which He is depends on ourselves. Trusted, loved,

followed, He is light. Neglected, turned from, He is darkness. Though

He be the Light of the world, it is only the man who follows Him to

whom He can give the light of life. Therefore, man's awful prerogative

of perverting the best into the worst forced Him, who came to be the

light of men, to that sad and solemn utterance: For judgment I am come

into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which

see might be made blind.'

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THREE ASPECTS OF FAITH

Many believed on Him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on

Him . . . .'--JOHN viii. 30, 31.

The Revised Version accurately represents the original by varying the

expression in these two clauses, retaining believed on Him' in the

former, and substituting the simple believed Him' in the latter. The

variation in two contiguous clauses can scarcely be accidental in so

careful a writer as the Apostle John. And the reason and meaning of it

are obvious enough on the face of the narrative. His purpose is to

distinguish between more and less perfect acceptance of Jesus Christ.

The more perfect is the former, they believed on Him'; the less perfect

is the latter, the simple acceptance of His word on His claim of

Messiahship, which is stigmatised as shallow, and proved to be

transient by the context.

They were Jews' which believed, and they continued to be so whilst they

were believing. Now, the word Jew' in this Gospel always connotes

antagonism to Jesus Christ; and as for these persons, how slight and

unreliable their adhesion to the Lord is, comes out in the course of

the next few verses; and by the end of the chapter they are taking up

stones to stone Him. So John would show us that there is a kind of

acceptance which may be real, and may be the basis of something much

better hereafter, but which, if it does not grow, rots and disappears;

and he would draw a broad line of distinction between that and the

other mental act, far deeper, more wholesome, more lasting and vital,

which he designates as believing on Him.' I take these words, then, for

consideration, not so much to deal with other thoughts suggested by

them, as because they afford me a starting-point for the consideration

of the various phases of the act of believing, its blessings and its

nature, and its relation to its objects, which are expressed in the New

Testament by the various grammatical connections and constructions of

this word.

Now, the facts with which I wish to deal may be very briefly stated.

There are three ways in which the New Testament represents the act of

believing, and its relation to its Object, Christ. These three are,

first, the simple one which appears in the text as believed Him.' Then

there is a second, which appears in two forms, slightly different, but

which, for our purpose, may be treated as substantially the

same--believing on Him.' And then there is a third, which, literally

and accurately translated is, believing unto' or into Him.' That phrase

is John's favourite one, and rather unfortunately, though perhaps

necessarily, it has been generally rendered by our translators by the

less forcible believing in,' which gives the idea of repose in, but

does not give the idea of motion towards. These three, then, I think,

do set forth, if we will ponder them, very large lessons as to the

essence of this act of believing, as to the Object upon which it

fastens, and as to the blessings which flow from it, which it will be

worth our while to consider now. I may cast the whole into the shape of

three exhortations: believe Him, believe on Him, believe unto Him.

I. First, then, believe Christ.

We accept a man's words when we trust the man. Even if belief, or

faith, is represented in the New Testament, as it very rarely is, as

having for its object the words of revelation, behind that acceptance

of the words lies confidence in the person speaking. And the beginning

of all true Christian faith has in it, not merely the intellectual

acceptance of certain propositions as true, but a confidence in the

veracity of Him by whom they are made known to us--even Jesus Christ

our Lord.

I do not need to insist upon that at any length here--it would take me

away from my present purpose; but what I do wish to emphasise is, that

from the very starting-point, the smallest germ of the most rudimentary

and imperfect faith which knits a soul to Jesus Christ has Him for its

Object, and is thus distinguished from the mere acceptance of truths

which, on other grounds than the authority of the speaker, may

legitimately commend themselves to a man.

Then believe Him. Now, that breaks up into two thoughts, which are all

that I intend to deduce from it now, although many more might be

suggested. The one is this, that the least and the lowest that Jesus

Christ asks from us is the entire and unhesitating acceptance of His

utterances as final, conclusive, and absolutely true. Whatever more

Jesus Christ may be, He is, by His life and words, the Communicator of

divine and certain truth. He is a Teacher, though He is a great deal

more. And whatever more Christian faith may be--and it is a great deal

more--it requires, at least, the frank and full recognition of the

authority of every word that comes from His lips. A Christianity

without a creed is a dream. Bones without flesh are very dry, no doubt;

but what about flesh without bones? An inert, shapeless mass. You will

never have a vigorous and true Christian life if it is to be moulded

according to the fantastic dream of these latter days, which tells us

that we may take Jesus as the Guide of our conduct and need not mind

about what He says to us. Believe Me' is His requirement. The words of

His mouth, and the revelations which He has made in the sweetness of

His life, and in all the graciousness of His dealings, are the very

unveiling to man of absolute and final and certain truth.

But then, on the other hand, let us remember that, while all this is

most clear and distinct in the teaching of Scripture, it carries us but

a very short way. We find, in the instance from which we take our

starting-point in this sermon, the broad distinction drawn, and

practically illustrated in the conduct of the persons concerned,

between the simple acceptance of what Christ says, and a true faith

that clings to Him for evermore. And the same kind of disparagement of

the lower process of merely accepting His word is found more than once

in connection with the same phrases. We find, for instance, the two

which are connected in our texts used in a previous conversation

between our Lord and His antagonists. When He says to them, This is the

work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent,' they reply,

dragging down His claim to a lower level, What sign showest Thou, that

we may see, and believe Thee?' He demanded belief on Himself; they

answer, We are ready to believe you, on condition that we see something

that may make the rendering of our belief a logical necessity for us.'

Let us lay to heart the rudimentary and incomplete character of a faith

which simply accepts the teaching of Jesus Christ, and does no more.

The notion that orthodoxy is Christianity, that a man who does not

contradict the teaching of the New Testament is thereby a Christian, is

a very old and very perilous and very widespread one. There are many of

us who have no better claim to be called Christians than this, that we

never denied anything that Jesus Christ said, though we are not

sufficiently interested in it, I was going to say, even to deny it.

This rudimentary faith, which contents itself with the acceptance of

the truth revealed, hardens into mere formalism, or liquefies into mere

careless indifference as to the very truth that it professes to

believe. There is nothing more impotent than creeds which lie dormant

in our brains, and have no influence upon our lives. I wonder how many

readers of this sermon, who fancy themselves good Christians, do with

their creed as the Japanese used to do with their Emperor--keep him in

a palace behind bamboo screens, and never let him do anything, whilst

all the reality of power was possessed by another man, who did not

profess to be a king at all. Do you think you are Christians because

you would sign thirty-nine or three hundred and ninety articles of

Christianity, if they were offered to you, while there is not one of

them that influences either your thinking or your conduct? Do not let

us have these sluggish kings,' with a mayor of the place to do the real

government, but set on the throne of your hearts the principles of your

religion, and see to it that all your convictions be translated into

practice, and all your practice be informed by your convictions.

This belief in a set of dogmas, on the authority of Jesus Christ, about

which dogmas we do not care a rush, and which make no difference upon

our lives, is the faith about which James has so many hard things to

say; and he ventures upon a parallel that I should not like to venture

on unless I were made bold by his example: Thou believest, O vain man!

thou doest well: the devils also believe, and'--better than you, in

that their belief does something for them, they believe--and tremble!'

But what shall we say about a man who professes himself a disciple, and

neither trembles, nor thrills, nor hopes, nor dreads, nor desires, nor

does any single thing because of his creed? Believe Jesus, but do not

stop there.

II. Believe on Christ.

Now, as I have remarked already, and as many of you know, there is a

slightly different, twofold form of this phrase in Scripture. I need

not trouble you with the minute distinction between the one and the

other. Both forms coincide in the important point on which I wish to

touch. That representation of believing on Christ carries us away at

once from the mere act of acceptance of His word on His authority to

the far more manifestly voluntary, moral, and personal act of reliance

upon Him. The metaphor is expanded in various ways in Scripture, and

instead of offering any thoughts of my own about it, I would simply ask

attention to three of the forms in which it is set forth in the Old and

in the New Testaments.

The first of them, and the one which we may regard as governing the

others, is that found in the words of Isaiah, Behold, I lay in Zion a

stone, a sure Foundation'; and, as the Apostle Peter comments, He that

believeth on Him shall not be confounded.' There the thoughts presented

are the superposition of the building upon its Foundation, the rest of

the soul, and the rearing of the life on the basis of Jesus Christ.

How much that metaphor says to us about Him as the Foundation, in all

the aspects in which we can apply that term! He is the Basis of our

hope, the Guarantee of our security, the Foundation-stone of our

beliefs, the very Ground on which our whole life reposes, the Source of

our tranquillity, the Pledge of our peace. All that I think, feel,

desire, wish, and do, ought to be rested upon that dear Lord, and

builded on Him by simple faith. By patient persistence of effort

rearing up the fabric of my life firmly upon Him, and grafting every

stone of it--if I might so use the metaphor--into the bedding-stone,

which is Christ, I shall be strong, peaceful, and pure.

The storm comes, the waters rise, the winds howl, the hail and the rain

sweep away the refuge of lies,' and the dwellers in these frail and

foundationless houses are hurrying in wild confusion from one peak to

another, before the steadily rising tide. But he that builds on that

Foundation shall not make haste,' as Isaiah has it; shall not need to

hurry to shift his quarters before the flood overtake him; shall look

out serene upon all the hurtling fury of the wild storm, and the rise

of the sullen waters. So, reliance on Christ, and the honest making of

Him the Basis, not of our hopes only, but of our thinkings and of our

doings, and of our whole being, is the secret of security, and the

pledge of peace.

Then there is another form of the same phrase, believing on,' in which

is suggested not so much the figure of building upon a foundation, as

of some feeble man resting upon a strong stay, or clinging to an

outstretched and mighty arm. The same metaphor is implied in the word

reliance.' We lean upon Christ when, forsaking all other props, and

realising His sufficiency and sweetness, we rest the whole weight of

our weariness and all the impotence of our weakness upon His strong and

unwearied arm, and so are saved. All other stays are like that one to

which the prophet compares the King of Egypt--the papyrus reed in the

Nile stream, on which, if a man leans, it will break into splinters

which will go into his flesh, and make a poisoned wound. But if we lean

on Christ, we lean on a brazen wall and an iron pillar, and anything is

possible sooner than that that stay shall give.

There is still another form of the metaphor, in which neither building

upon a foundation, nor leaning upon a support which is thought of as

below what rests upon it, are suggested, but rather the hanging upon

something firm and secure which is above what hangs from it. The same

picture is suggested by our word dependence.' As a nail fastened in a

sure place,' said one of the prophets, on Him shall hang all the glory

of His Father's house.'

Hangs my helpless soul on Thee.'

The rope lowered over the cliffs supports the adventurous bird-nester

in safety above the murmuring sea. They who clasp Christ's hand

outstretched from above, may swing over the deepest, most vacuous

abyss, and fear no fall.

So, brother, build on Christ, rely on Him, depend on Him, and it shall

not be in vain. But if you will not build on the sure Foundation, do

not wonder if the rotten one gives way. If you will not lean on the

strong Stay, complain not when the weak one crumbles to dust beneath

your weight. And if you choose to swing over the profound depth at the

end of a piece of pack-thread, instead of holding on by an adamantine

chain wrapped round God's throne, you must be prepared for its breaking

and your being smashed to pieces below.

III. The last exhortation that comes out of this comparative study of

these phrases is--Believe into Christ.

That is a very pregnant and remarkable expression, and it can scarcely,

as you see, be rendered into our language without a certain harshness;

but still it is worth while to face the harshness for the sake of

getting the double signification that is involved in it. For when we

speak of believing unto or into Him, we suggest two things, both of

which, apparently, were in the minds of the writers of the New

Testament. One is motion towards, and the other is repose in, that dear

Lord.

So, then, true Christian faith is the flight of the soul towards

Christ. Therein is one of the special blessednesses of the Christian

life, that it has for its object and aim absolutely infinite and

unattainable completeness and glory, so that unwearied freshness,

inexhaustible buoyancy, endless progress, are the dower of every spirit

that truly trusts in Christ. All other aims and objects are limited,

transient, and will be left behind. Every other landmark will sink

beneath the horizon, where so many of our landmarks have sunk already,

and where they will all disappear when the last moment comes. But we

may have, and if we are Christian people we shall have, bright before

us, sufficiently certain of being reached to make our efforts hopeful

and confident, sufficiently certain of never being reached to make our

efforts blessed with endless aspirations, the great light and love of

that dear Lord, to yearn after whom is better than to possess all

besides, and following hard after whom, even in the very motion there

is rest, and in the search there is finding. Religion is the flight of

the soul, the aspiration of the whole man after the unattainable

Attainable--that I may know Him, and be found in Him.'

Oh, how such thoughts ought to shame us who call ourselves Christians!

Growth, progress, getting nearer to Christ, yearning ever with a great

desire after Him!--do not the words seem irony when applied to most of

us? Think of the average type of sluggish contentment with present

attainments that marks Christian people--tortoises in their crawling

rather than eagles in their flight. And let us take our portion of

shame, and remember that the faith which believes Him, and that which

believes on Him, both need to be crowned and perfected by that which

believes towards Him, of which the motto is, Forgetting the things that

are behind, I reach forward to the things that are before.'

But there is another side to this last phase of faith. That true

believing towards or unto Christ is the rest of the soul in Him. By

faith that deep and most real union of the believing soul with Jesus

Christ is effected which may be fitly described as our entrance into

and abode in Him. The believer is as if incorporated into Him in whom

he believes. Indeed, the Apostle ventures to use a more startling

expression than incorporation when he says that he that is joined to

the Lord is one Spirit.' If by faith we press towards, by faith we

shall be in, Christ. Faith is at once motion and rest, search and

finding, desire and fruition. The felicity of this last form of the

phrase is its expression of both these ideas, which are united in fact

as in word. A rare construction of the verb to believe, with the simple

preposition in, coincides with this part of the meaning of believing

unto or into, and need not be separately considered.

With this understanding of its meaning, we see how natural is John's

preference for this construction. For surely, if he has anything to

tell us, it is that the true Christian life is a life enclosed, as it

were, in Jesus Christ. Nor need I remind you how Paul, though he starts

from a different point of view, yet coincides with John in this

teaching. For, to him, to be in Christ' is the sum of all blessedness,

righteousness, peace, and power. As in an atmosphere, we may dwell in

Him. He may be the strong Habitation to which we may continually

resort. One of the Old Testament words for trusting means taking

refuge, and such a thought is naturally suggested by this New Testament

form of expression. I flee unto Thee to hide me.' In that Fortress we

dwell secure.

To be in Jesus, wedded to Him by the conjunction of will and desire,

wedded to Him in the oneness of a believing spirit and in the obedience

of a life, to be thus in Christ is the crown and climax of faith, and

the condition of all perfection. To be in Christ is life; to be out of

Him is death. In Him we have redemption; in Him we have wisdom, truth,

peace, righteousness, hope, confidence. To be in Him is to be in

heaven. We enter by faith. Faith is not the acceptance merely of His

Word, but is the reliance of the soul on Him, the flight of the soul

towards Him, the dwelling of the soul in Him. Come, My people, into thy

chambers, and shut thy doors about thee . . . until the indignation be

overpast.'

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NEVER IN BONDAGE'

We . . . were never in bondage to any man: how gayest Thou, Ye shall be

made free!'--JOHN viii. 33.

Never in bondage to any man'? Then what about Egypt, Babylon, Persia,

Syria? Was there not a Roman garrison looking down from the castle into

the very Temple courts where this boastful falsehood was uttered? It

required some hardihood to say, Never in bondage to any man,' in the

face of such a history, and such a present. But was it not just an

instance of the strange power which we all have and exercise, of

ignoring disagreeable facts, and by ingenious manipulation taking the

wrinkles out of the photograph? The Jews were perhaps not

misunderstanding Jesus Christ quite so much as these words may suggest.

If He had been promising, as they chose to assume, political and

external liberty, I fancy they would have risen to the bait a little

more eagerly than they did to His words.

But be that as it may, this strange answer of theirs suggests that

power of ignoring what we do not want to see, not only in the way in

which I have suggested, but also in another. For if they had any

inkling of what Jesus meant by slavery and freedom, they, by such words

as these, put away from themselves the thought that they were, in any

deep and inward sense, bondsmen, and that a message of liberty had any

application to them. Ah, dear friends! there was a great deal of human

nature in these men, who thus put up a screen between them and the

penetrating words of our Lord. Were they not doing just what many of

us--all of us to some extent--do: ignoring the facts of their own

necessities, of their own spiritual condition, denying the plain

lessons of experience? Like them, are not we too often refusing to look

in the face the fact that we all, apart from Him, are really in

bondage? Because we do not realise the slavery, are we not indifferent

to the offer of freedom? We were never in bondage'; consequently we

add, How sayest Thou, Ye shall be made free?' So then, my text brings

us to think of three things: our bondage, our ignorance of our bondage,

our consequent indifference to Christ's offer of liberty. Let me say a

word or two about each of these.

First as to--

I. Our bondage.

Christ follows the vain boast in the text, with the calm, grave,

profound explanation of what He meant: Whoso committeth sin is the

slave of sin.' That is true in two ways. By the act of sinning a man

shows that he is the slave of an alien power that has captured him; and

in the act of sinning, he rivets the chains and increases the tyranny.

He is a slave, or he would not obey sin. He is more a slave because he

has again obeyed it. Now, do not let us run away with the idea that

when Jesus speaks of sin and its bondage, He is thinking only, or

mainly, of gross outrages and contradictions of the plain law of

morality and decency, that He is thinking only of external acts which

all men brand as being wrong, or of those which law qualifies as

crimes. We have to go far deeper than that, and into a far more inward

region of life than that, before we come to apprehend the inwardness

and the depth of the Christian conception of what sin is. We have to

bring our whole life close up against God, and then to judge its deeds

thereby. Therefore, though I know I am speaking to a mass of

respectable, law-abiding people, very few of you having any knowledge

of the grosser and uglier forms of transgression, and I dare say none

of you having any experience of what it is to sin against human law,

though I do not charge you--God forbid!--with vices, and still less

with crimes, I bring to each man's conscience a far more searching word

than either of these two, when I say, We all have sinned and come short

of the glory of God.' This declaration of the universality and reality

of the bondage of sin is only the turning into plain words of a fact

which is of universal experience, though it may be of a very much less

universal consciousness. We may not be aware of the fact, because, as I

have to show you, we do not direct our attention to it. But there it

is; and the truth is that every man, however noble his aspirations

sometimes, however pure and high his convictions, and however honest in

the main may be his attempts to do what is right, when he deals

honestly with himself, becomes more or less conscious of just that

experience which a great expert in soul analysis and self-examination

made: I find a law'--an influence working upon my heart with the

inevitableness and certainty of law--that when I would do good, evil is

present with me.'

We all know that, whether we regard it as we ought or no. We all say

Amen to that, when it is forced upon our attention. There is something

in us that thwarts aspiration towards good, and inclines to evil.

What will but felt the fleshly screen?'

And it is not only a screen. It not only prevents us from rising as

high as we would, but it sinks us so low as to do deeds that something

within us recoils from and brands as evil. Jesus teaches us that he who

commits sin is the slave of sin; that is to say, that an alien power

has captured and is coercing the wrongdoer. That teaching does not

destroy responsibility, but it kindles hope. A foreign foe, who has

invaded the land, may be driven out of the land, and all his prisoners

set free, if a stronger than he comes against him. Christianity is

called gloomy and stern, because it preaches the corruption of man's

heart. Is it not a gospel to draw a distinction between the evil that a

man does, and the self that a man may be? Is it not better, more

hopeful, more of a true evangel, to say to a man, Sin dwelleth in you,'

than to say, What is called sin is only the necessary action of human

nature'? To believe that their present condition is not slavery makes

men hopeless of ever gaining freedom, and the true gospel of the

emancipation of humanity rests on the Christian doctrine of the bondage

of sin.

Let me remind you that freedom consists not in the absence of external

constraints, but in the animal in us being governed by the will, for

when the flesh is free the man is a slave. And it means that the will

should be governed by the conscience; and it means that the conscience

should be governed by God. These are the stages. Men are built in three

stories, so to speak. Down at the bottom, and to be kept there, are

inclinations, passions, lust, desires, all which are but blind aimings

after their appropriate satisfaction, without any question as to

whether the satisfaction is right or wrong; and above that a dominant

will which is meant to control, and above that a conscience. That is

the public men are more and more abasing themselves to the degradation

of ministering to the supposed wishes instead of cutting dead against

the grain of the wishes, if necessary, in order to meet the true wants,

of the people. Wherever some one strong man stands up to oppose the

wild current of popular desires, he may make up his mind that the

charge of being a bad citizen, unpatriotic, a lover of the enemies of

the people,' will be flung at him. You Christian men and women have to

face the same calumnies as your Master had. The rotten eggs flung at

the objects of popular execration--if I might use a somewhat violent

figure--turn to roses in their flight. The praises of good men and the

scoffs of loose-living and godless ones are equally valuable

certificates of character. The Church which does not earn the same sort

of opprobrium which attended its Master has probably failed of its

duty. It is good to be called gloomy' and sour-visaged' by those whose

only notion of pleasure is effervescent immorality; and it is good to

be called intolerant by the crowd that desires us to be tolerant of

vice. So, my friends, I want you to understand that you, too, have to

tread in the Master's steps. The imitation of Jesus' does not consist

merely in the sanctities and secrecies of communion, and the blessings

of a meek and quiet heart, but includes standing where He stood, in

avowed and active opposition to widespread evils, and, if need be, in

the protesting opposition to popular error. And if you are called

nicknames, never mind! Remember what the Master said, They shall bring

you before kings and magistrates'--the tribunal of the many-headed is a

more formidable judgment-bench than that of any king--and it shall turn

to a testimony for you.'

II. Now, secondly, this name is the witness to what I venture to call,

for want of a better term, the originality of Jesus Christ.

It bears witness to the dim feeling which onlookers had that in Him was

a new phenomenon, not to be accounted for by birth and descent, by

training and education, or by the whole of what people nowadays call

environment. He did not come out of these circumstances. This is not a

regulation pattern type of Jew. He is a Samaritan.' That is to say, He

is unlike the people among whom He dwells; and betrays that other

influences than those which shaped them have gone to the making of Him.

That is one of the most marked, outstanding, and important features in

the teaching and in the character of Jesus Christ, that it is

absolutely independent of, and incapable of being accounted for by,

anything that He derived from the circumstances in which He lived. He

was a Jew, and yet He was not a Jew. He was not a Samaritan, and yet He

was a Samaritan. He was not a Greek, and yet He was one. He was not a

Roman, nor an Englishman, nor a Hindoo, nor an Asiatic, nor an African;

and yet He had all the characteristics of these races within Himself,

and held them all in the ample sweep of His perfect Manhood.

If we turn to His teaching we find that, whilst no doubt to some extent

it is influenced in its forms by the necessities of its adaptation to

the first listeners, there is a certain element in it far beyond

anything that came from Rabbis, or even from prophets and psalmists.

Modern Christian scholarship has busied itself very much in these days

with studying Jewish literature, so far as it is available, in order to

ascertain how far it formed the teaching, or mind, of Jesus the

Carpenter of Nazareth. There is a likeness, but the likeness only

serves to make the unlikeness more conspicuous. And I, for my part,

venture to assert that, whilst the form of our Lord's teaching may

largely be traced to the influences under which He was brought up, and

whilst the substance of some parts of it may have been anticipated by

earlier Rabbis of His nation, the crowd that listened to Him on the

mountain top had laid their fingers upon the more important fact when

they wondered at His teaching,' and found the characteristic difference

between it, and that of the men to whom they had listened, in the note

of authority with which He spoke. Jesus never argues, He asserts; He

claims; and in lieu of all arguments He gives you His own Verily!

verily! I say unto you.'

Thus not only in its form, but in its substance, in its lofty morality,

in its spiritual religion, in its revelation of the Father and the

Fatherhood for all men, Christ's teaching as teaching stands absolutely

alone.

If we turn to His character, the one thing that strikes us is that

about it there is nothing of the limitations of time or race which

stamp all other men. He is not good after the fashion of His age, or of

any other age; He is simply embodied and perfect Goodness. This Tree

has shot up high above the fences that enclose the grove in which it

grows, and its leaf lasts for ever.

Run over, in your mind, other great names of heroes, saints, thinkers,

poets; they all bear the stamp of their age and circumstances, and the

type of goodness or the manner of thought which belonged to these.

Jesus Christ alone stands before men absolutely free from any of the

limitations which are essential in the case of every human excellence

and teacher. And so He comes to us with a strange freshness, with a

strange closeness; and nineteen centuries have not made Him fit less

accurately to our needs than He did to those of the generation amidst

which He condescended to live. Thickening mists of oblivion wrap all

other great names as they recede into the past; and about the loftiest

of them we have to say, This man, having served his generation, fell on

sleep, and saw corruption.' But Jesus Christ lasts, because there is

nothing local or temporary about His teaching or His character.

Now this peculiar originality, as I venture to call it, of Christ's

character is a very strong argument for the truthful accuracy of the

picture drawn of Him in these four Gospels. Where did these four men

get their Christ? Was it from imagination? Was it from myth? Was it

from the accidental confluence of a multitude of traditions? There is

an old story about a painter who, in despair of producing a certain

effect of storm upon the sea, at last flung his wet sponge at the

canvas, and to his astonishment found that it had done the very thing

he wanted. But wet sponges cannot draw likenesses; and to allege that

these four men drew such a picture, in such compass, without anybody

sitting for it, seems to me about the most desperate hypothesis that

ever was invented. If there were no Christ, or if the Christ that was,

was not like what the Gospels paint Him as being, then the authors of

these little booklets are consummate geniuses, and their works stand at

the very top of the imaginative literature of the world. It is more

difficult to account for the Gospels, if they are not histories, than

it is to account for the Christ whom they tell us of if they are.

And then, further, there is only one key to the mystery of this

originality. Christ is perfect man, high above limitations, and owing

nothing to environment, because He is the Son of God. I would as soon

believe that grass roots, which for years, in some meadow, had brought

forth, season after season, nothing but humble green blades, shot up

suddenly into a palm tree, as I would believe that simple natural

descent brought all at once into the middle of the dull succession of

commonplace and sinful men this radiant and unique Figure. Account for

Christ, all you unbelievers! The question of to-day, round which all

the battle is being fought, is the person of Jesus Christ. If He be

what the Gospels tell us that He is, there is nothing left for the

unbeliever worth a struggle. What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?'

The Jews said, Thou art a Samaritan!' We say, Thou art the Christ; the

Son of the living God!'

III. Lastly, the name bears witness to Christ's universality.

I presume that, in addition to what seemed His hostility to what was

taken to be true Judaism, another set of facts underlay the name--viz.

those which indicated His kindly relations with the people whom it was

every good Jew's pleasant duty to hate with all his heart. The story of

the Samaritan woman in John's Gospel, the parable of the good

Samaritan, the incident of the grateful leper, who was a Samaritan, the

refusal to allow the eager Apostles to bring down fire from heaven to

consume inhospitable churls in a Samaritan village, were but

outstanding specimens of what must have been a characteristic of His

whole career not unknown to His enemies. So they argued, If you love

our enemies you must hate us; and you must be one of them,' thereby

distorting, but yet presenting, what is the great glory of Christ's

Gospel, and of Christ Himself, that He belongs to the world; and that

His salvation, the sweep of His love, and the power of His Cross, are

meant for all mankind.

That universality largely arises from the absence of the limitations of

which I have already spoken sufficiently. Because He belongs to no one

period as regards His character, He is available for all periods as

regards His efficacy. Because His teaching is not dyed in the hues of

any school or of any age or of any cast of thought, it suits for all

mankind. This water comes clear from the eternal rock, and has no taint

of any soil through which it has flowed. Therefore the thirsty lips of

a world may be glued to it, and drink and be satisfied. His one

sacrifice avails for the whole world.

But let me remind you that universality means also individuality, and

that Jesus Christ is the Christ for all men because He is each man's

Christ. The tree of life stands in the middle of the garden that all

may have equal access to it. Is this universal Christ yours; thine?

That is the question. Make Him so by putting out your hand and claiming

your share in Him, by casting your soul upon Him, by trusting your all

to Him, by listening to His word, by obeying His commands, by drinking

in the fulness of His blessing. You can do so if you will. If you do

not, the universal Christ is nothing to you. Make Him thine, and be

sure that the sweep of His love and the efficacy of His sacrifice

embrace and include thee. He is the universal Christ; therefore He is

the only Christ; neither is there salvation in any other.' Through Him

all men, each man, thou, must be saved. Without Him all men, every man,

thou, can not be saved. Take Him for yours, and you will find that each

who possesses Him, possesses Him altogether, and none hinders the other

in his full enjoyment of the bread of God which came down from heaven.'

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ONE METAPHOR AND TWO MEANINGS

I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night

cometh when no man can work.'--JOHN ix. 4.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off

the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.'--ROMANS

xiii. 12.

The contrast between these two sayings will strike you at once. Using

the same metaphors, they apply them in exactly opposite directions. In

the one, life is the day, and the state beyond death the night; in the

other, life is the night, and the state beyond death the day.

Remarkable as the contrast is, it comes to be still more so if we

remember the respective speakers. For each of them says what we should

rather have expected the other to say. It would have been natural for

Paul to have given utterance to the stimulus to diligence caused by the

consciousness that the time of work was brief; and it would have been

as natural for Jesus, who, as we believe, came from God, from the place

of the eternal supernal glory, to have said that life here was night as

compared with the illumination that He had known. But it is the divine

Master who gives utterance to the common human consciousness of a brief

life ending in inactivity, and it is the servant who takes the higher

point of view.

So strange did the words of my first text seem as coming from our

Lord's lips, that the sense of incongruity seems to have been the

occasion of the remarkable variation of reading which the Revised

Version has adopted when it says We must work the works of Him that

sent Me.' But that thought seems to me to be perfectly irrelevant to

our Lord's purpose in this context, where He is vindicating His own

action, and not laying down the duty of His servants. He is giving here

one of these glimpses, that we so rarely get, into His own inmost

heart. And so we have to take the sharp contrast between the Master's

thought and the servant's thought, and to combine them, if we would

think rightly about the present and the future, and do rightly in the

present.

I. Let me ask you to look at the Master's thought about the present and

the future.

As I have already said, our Lord gives utterance here to the very

common, in fact, universal human consciousness. The contrast between

the intense little spot of light and the great ring of darkness round

about it; between the warm precincts of the cheerful day' and the cold

solitudes of the inactive night has been the commonplace and

stock-in-trade of moralists and thoughtful men from the beginning; has

given pathos to poetry, solemnity to our days; and has been the ally of

base as well as of noble things. For to say to a man, there are twelve

hours in the day of life, and then comes darkness, the blackness that

swallows up all activity,' may either be made into a support of all

lofty and noble thoughts, or, by the baser sort, may be, and has been,

made into a philosophy of the Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we

die' kind; Gather ye roses while ye may'; A short life and a merry

one.' The thought stimulates to diligence, but it does nothing to

direct the diligence. It makes men work furiously, but it never will

prevent them from working basely. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do

it with thy might,' is a conclusion from the consideration that there

is neither wisdom nor knowledge nor device in the grave whither we go,'

but what the hand should find to do must be settled from altogether

different considerations.

Our Lord here takes the common human point of view, and says, Life is

the time for activity, and it must be the more diligent because it is

ringed by the darkness of the night.' What precisely does our Lord

intend by His use of that metaphor of the night? No figures, we know,

run upon all-fours. The point of comparison may be simply in some one

feature common to the two things compared, and so all sorts of mischief

may be done by trying to extend the analogy to other features. Now,

there are a great many points in which day and night may respectively

be taken as analogues of Life and Death and the state beyond death.

There is a night of weeping'; there is a night of ignorance.' But our

Lord Himself tells us what is the one point of comparison which alone

is in His mind, when He says, The night cometh, when no man can work.'

It is simply the night as a season of compulsory inactivity that

suggests the comparison in our text. And so we have here the

presentation of that dear Lord as influenced by the common human

motive, and feeling that there was work to be done which must be

crowded into a definite space, because when that space was past, there

would be no more opportunity for the work to be done.

Look at how, in the words of my first text, we have, as I said, a

glimpse into His inmost heart. He lets us see that all His life was

under the solemn compulsion of that great must which was so often upon

His lips, that He felt that He was here to do the Father's will, and

that that obligation lay upon Him with a pressure which He neither

could, nor would if He could, have got rid of.

There are two kinds of musts' in our lives. There is the unwelcome

necessity which grips us with iron and sharpened fangs; the needs-be

which crushes down hopes and dreams and inclinations, and forces the

slave to his reluctant task. And there is the must' which has passed

into the will, into the heart, and has moulded the inmost desire to

conformity with the obligation which no more stands over against us as

a taskmaster with whip and chain, but has passed within us and is there

an inspiration and a joy. He that can say, as Jesus Christ in His

humanity could, and did say: My meat'--the refreshment of my nature,

the necessary sustenance of my being--is to do the will of my Father';

that man, and that man alone, feels no pressure that is pain from the

incumbency of the necessity that blessedly rules His life. When I will'

and I choose' coincide, like two of Euclid's triangles atop of one

another, line for line and angle for angle, then comes liberty into the

life. He that can say, not with a knitted brow and an unwilling ducking

of his head to the yoke, I must do it,' but can say, Thy law is within

my heart,' that is the Christlike, the free, the happy man.

Further, our Lord here, in His thoughts of the present and the future,

lets us see what He thought that the work of God in the world was. The

disciples looked at the blind man sitting by the wayside, and what he

suggested to them was a curious, half theological, half metaphysical

question, in which Rabbinical subtlety delighted. Who did sin, this man

or his parents?' They only thought of talking over the theological

problem involved in the fact that, before he had done anything in this

world to account for the calamity, he was born blind. Jesus Christ

looked at the man, and He did not think about theological cobwebs. What

was suggested to Him was to fight against the evil and abolish it. It

is sometimes necessary to discuss the origin of an evil thing, of a

sorrow or a sin, in order to understand how to deal with and get rid of

it. But unless that is the case, our first business is not to say, How

comes this about?' but our business is to take steps to make it cease

to come about. Cure the man first and then argue to your heart's

content about what made him blind, but cure him first. And so Jesus

Christ taught us that the meaning of the day of life was that we should

set ourselves to abolish the works of the devil, and that the work of

God was that we should fight against sin and sorrow, and in so far as

it was in our power, abolish these, in all the variety of their forms,

in all the vigour of their abundant growth. Sorrow and sin are God's

call to every one of His sons and daughters to set themselves to cast

them out of His fair creation; and the day' is the opportunity for

doing that.

Our Lord here, as I have already suggested, shows us very touchingly

and beautifully, how entirely He bore our human nature, and had entered

into our conditions, in that He, too, felt that common human emotion,

and was spurred to unhasting and yet unresting diligence by the thought

of the coming of the night. I suppose that although we have few

chronological data in this Gospel of John, the hour of our Lord's death

was really very near at that time. He had just escaped from a

formidable attempt upon His life. They took up stones to stone Him, but

He, passing through the midst of them, went His way,' is the statement

which immediately precedes the account of His meeting with this blind

man. And so under the pressure, perhaps, of that immediate experience

which revealed the depths of hatred that was ready for anything against

Him, He gives utterance to this expression: If it be the case that the

time is at hand, then the more need that, Sabbath day as it is, I

should pause here.' Though the multitude were armed with stones to

stone Him, He stopped in His flight because there was a poor blind man

there whom He felt that He needed to cure. Beautiful it is, and drawing

Him very near to us,--and it should draw us very near to Him--that thus

He shared in that essentially human consciousness of the limitation of

the power to work, by the ring of blackness that encircled the little

spot of illuminated light.

But some will say, How is it possible that such a consciousness as this

should really have been in the mind of Jesus Christ?' Did He not know

that His death was not to be the end of His work? Did He not know, and

say over and over again, in varying forms, that when He passed from

earth, it was not into inactivity? Is it not the very characteristic of

His mission that it is different from that of all other helpers and

benefactors and teachers of the world, in that His death stands in the

very middle of His work, and that on the one side of it there is

activity, and on the other side of it there is still, and in some sense

loftier and greater, activity?' Yes; all that is perfectly true, and I

do not for a moment believe that our Lord was forgetting that the life

on the earth was but the first volume of His biography, and of the

records of His deeds, and that He contemplated them, as He contemplated

always, the life beyond, as working in and on and over and through His

servants, even unto the end of the world.

But you have only to remember the difference between the earthly and

the heavenly life of the Lord fully to understand the point of view

that He takes here. The one is the basis of the other; the one is the

seedtime, the other is the harvest. The one has only the limited years

of the earthly life, in which it can be done; the other has the endless

years of Eternity, through which it is to be continued. And if any part

of that earthly life of the Lord had been void of its duty, and of its

discharge of the Father's will, not even He, amidst the blaze of the

heavenly glory, could have thereafter filled up the tiny gap. All the

earthly years were needed to be filled with service, up to the great

service and sacrifice of the Cross, in order that upon them might be

reared the second stage and phase of His heavenly life. With regard to

the one, He said on the Cross, It is finished.' But when He died He

passed not into the night of inactivity, but into the day of greater

service. And that higher and heavenly form of His work continues, and

not until the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our God

and of His Christ,' and the whole benefit and effect of His earthly

life are imparted to the whole race of man, will it be said, It is

done,' and the angels of heaven proclaim the completion of His work for

man. But seeing that that work has its twofold forms, Jesus, like us,

had to be conscious of the limitations of life, and of the night that

followed the day.

II. And now turn, in the second place, to the servant's thought.

As I have already pointed out, it is the precise reversal of the other.

What to Christ is day' to Paul is night.' What to Christ is night' to

Paul is day.' Now the first point that I would make is this, that the

future would never have been day' to Paul if Jesus had not gone down

into the darkness of the night.' I have said that there was only one

point of comparison in our Lord's mind between night and death. But we

may venture to extend the figure a little, and to say that the Light

went into the valley of the shadow of Death,' and lit it up from end to

end. The Life went into the palace of Death, and breathed life into all

there. There is a great picture by one of the old monkish masters, on

the walls of a Florentine convent, which represents the descent of

Jesus to that dim region of the dead. Around Him there is a halo of

light that shines into the gloomy corridor, up which the thronging

patriarchs and saints of the Old Dispensation are coming, with

outstretched hands of eager welcome and acceptance, to receive the

blessing. Ah! it is true, the people that walked in darkness have seen

a great Light; and to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of

death, unto them hath the Light shined.' Christ the Light has gone down

into the darkness, and what to Him was night He has made for us day.

Just as Scripture all but confines the name of death to Christ's

experience upon the Cross, and by virtue of that experience softens it

down for the rest of us into the blessed image of sleep, so the Master

has turned the night of death into the dawning of the day.

Further, to the servant the brightness of that future day dimmed all

earth's garish glories into darkness. It was because Paul saw the

Beyond flaming with such lustre that the nearer distance to him seemed

to have sunk into gloom. Just as a man or other object between you and

the western sky when the sun is there will be all dark, so earth with

heaven behind it becomes a mere shadowy outline. The day that is beyond

outshines all the lustres and radiances of earth, and turns them into

darkness. You go into a room out of blazing tropical sunshine, and it

is all gloom and obscurity. He whose eyes are fixed on the day that is

to come will find that here he walks as one in the night.

And the brightness of that day, as well as the darkness of the present

night, directed the servant as to what he should be diligent in. Since

it is true that the day is at hand,' let us put on the armour of light,

and dress ourselves in garb fitting for it. Since it is true that the

night is far spent' let us put off the works of darkness.

III. And so that brings me to the last point, and that is the

combination of the Master's and the servant's thought, and the effect

that it should produce upon us.

It is not enough either for our hearts or our minds that we should say

the night cometh when no man can work.' Life is day, but it is night

also. Death is night but it is dawning as well. We cannot understand

either the present or the future unless we link them together. That

death which is the cessation of activity in one aspect, is, for

Christ's servants, as truly as for Christ, the beginning of an activity

in a higher and nobler form. I do not believe in a heaven of rest,

meaning by that, inaction; I still less believe in a death which puts

an end to the activity of the human spirit. I believe that this world

is our school, our apprenticeship, the place where we learn our trade

and exercise our faculties, where we paint the picture, as it were,

which we offer when we desire to be admitted to the great guild of

artists, and according to the result of which, in the eye of the Judge,

is our place hereafter. What the Germans call proof pieces'--that is

the meaning of life. And though the night cometh when no man can work,'

the day cometh when the characters we have made ourselves here, the

habits we have cultivated and indulged in, the capacities we have

exercised, and the set and drift of all our activity upon earth, will

determine the work that we get to do there.

So then, stereoscoping these two thoughts, we get the solid image that

results from them both. And it teaches us not only diligence, and thus

supplies stimulus, but it determines the direction of our diligence,

and thus supplies guidance. We ought to be misers of our time and

opportunities. Jesus Christ said, I must work the work of Him that sent

Me while it is day; the night cometh.' How much more ought you and I to

say so? And some of us ought very specially to say it, and to feel it,

because the hour when we shall have to lay down our tools is getting

very near, and the shadows are lengthening. If you had been in the

fields in these summer evenings during the last few days, you would

have seen the haymakers at work with more and more diligence as the

evening drew on darker and darker. Dear friends, some of us are at the

eleventh hour. Let us fill it with diligent work. The night cometh.

But my texts not only stimulate to diligence, but they direct the

diligence. If it be that there is a day beyond, and that Christ's folk

are the children of the day,' then let us not sleep as do others, but

let us watch and be sober.' We have to cast ourselves on Him as our

Saviour, to love Him as our Lord and Friend, to take Him as our Pattern

and our Guide, our Help, our Light, and our Life. And then we shall

neither be deceived by life's garish splendours nor oppressed by its

gloom and its sorrow; we shall neither shrink from that last moment, as

a night of inaction, nor be too eager to cast off the burden of our

present work, but we shall cheerfully toil at what will prepare us for

the day,' and the bell at night that rings us out of mill and factory

will not be unwelcome, for it will ring us in to higher work and nobler

service. The transition will be like one of those summer nights in the

Arctic circle, when the sun does not dip. Through a little thin film of

less light we shall pass into the perfect day, where the Lord God

Almighty and the Lamb are the light thereof,' and there shall be no

more night.'

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THE SIXTH MIRACLE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL--THE BLIND MADE TO SEE, AND THE SEEING MADE

BLIND

When Jesus had thus spoken, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the

spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, 7.

And said unto him, Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam, (which is by

interpretation, Sent). He went his way, therefore, and washed, and came

seeing.'--JOHN ix. 6, 7.

The proportionate length at which this miracle and its accompanying

effects are recorded, indicates very clearly the Evangelist's idea of

their relative importance. Two verses are given to the story of the

miracle; all the rest of the chapter to its preface and its issues. It

was a great thing to heal a man that was blind from his birth, but the

story of the gradual illumination of his spirit until it came to the

full light of the perception of Christ as the Son of God, was far more

to the Evangelist, and ought to be far more to us than giving the

outward eye power to discern the outward light.

The narrative has a prologue and an epilogue, and the true point of

view from which to look at it is found in the solemn words with which

our Lord closes the incident. For judgment am I come into this world,

that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be

made blind.'

So then the mere sign, important as it is, is the least thing that we

have to look at in our contemplations now.

I. We have here our Lord unveiling His deepest motives for bestowing an

unsought blessing.

It is remarkable, I think, that out of the eight miracles recorded in

this Gospel, there is only one in which our Lord responds to a request

to manifest His miraculous power; the others are all spontaneous.

In the other Gospels He heals sometimes because of the pleading of the

sufferer; sometimes because of the request of compassionate friends or

bystanders; sometimes unasked, because His own heart went out to those

that were in pain and sickness. But in John's Gospel, predominantly we

have the Son of God, who acts throughout as moved by His own deep

heart. That view of Christ reaches its climax in His own profound words

about His own laying down of His life: I came forth from the Father,

and am come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go unto the

Father.' So, not so much influenced by others as deriving motive and

impulse and law from Himself, He moves upon earth a fountain and not a

reservoir, the Originator and the Beginner of the blessings that He

bears.

And that is the point of view from which most strikingly the prologue

of our narrative sets forth His action in the miracle here. As Jesus

passed by,' says the story, He saw a man which was blind from his

birth.' He fixes His eye upon him. No cry from the blind man's lips

draws Him. He sits there unconscious of the kind eyes that were

fastened upon him. The disciples stand at Christ's side, and have no

share in His feelings. They ask Him to do nothing. To them the blind

man is--what? A theological problem. No trace of pity touches their

hearts. They do not even seem to have reckoned upon or expected

Christ's miraculous intervention. And that is a very remarkable feature

in the Gospels. At all events, they evidently do not expect it here;

but all that the sight of this lifelong sufferer does in them is to

raise a question, Who did sin; he or his parents?' Perhaps they do not

quite see to the bottom of the alternative that they are suggesting;

and we need not trouble ourselves to ask whether there was a full-blown

notion of the pre-existence of the man's soul in their minds as they

ask the question. Perhaps they remembered the impotent man to whom our

Lord said, Go and sin no more lest a worse thing come unto thee.' And

they may have thought that they had His sanction to the doctrine--as

old as Job's friends--that wherever there was great suffering there

must first have been great sin.

That is all that the sight of sorrow does for some people. It leads to

censorious judgments, or to mere idle and curious speculations. Christ

lets us see what it did for Him, and what it is meant to do for us.

Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but he is born blind that

the works of God may be made manifest in him.' That is to say, human

sorrow is to be looked at by us as an opportunity for the manifestation

through us of God's mercy in relieving and stanching the wounds through

which the lifeblood is ebbing away. Do not stand coldly curious or

uncharitably censorious. Do not make miserable men theological

problems, but see in them a call for service. See in them an

opportunity for letting the light of God, so much of it as is in you,

shine from you, and your hands move in works of mercy.

And then the Master goes on to state still more distinctly the law

which dominated His life, and which ought to dominate ours: I must work

the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh when no

man can work.' Then poor men's misery is an occasion for the love of

God manifesting itself. Yes. But the love of God manifests itself

through human media, through persons; and if we adopt the reading of

these words which you will find in the Revised Version, and instead of

saying I must work,' read We must work,' then we have Christ extending

the law which ruled over His own life to all His followers, and making

it supremely obligatory and binding upon each of us. He for His part,

as I have said, moves through this Gospel as the Son of God, whose

mercy, and all whose doings are self-originated. But the other side of

that is that He moves through this Gospel in the humble attitude of

filial obedience, ever recognising that the Father's will is supreme in

His life; and that He is bound, with an obligation in which He

rejoices, to do the will of Him that sent Him. The consciousness of a

mission, the sense of filial obedience, the joyful surrender and

harmonising of the will of the Son with the will of the Father; these

things were the secret of the Master's life.

And coupled with them, even in Him there was the consciousness that

time was short; and although beyond the Cross and the grave there

stretched for Him an eternity in which He would work for the blessing

of the world, yet the special work which He had to do, while wearing

the veil and weakness of flesh, had but few days and hours in which it

could be done. Therefore, as we ought to do, He worked under the

limitations of mortality, and recognised in the brevity of life another

call to eager and continuous service.

These were His motives which, in common with Him, we may share. But He

adds another in which we have no share; and declares the unique

consciousness which ever stirred Him to His self-manifesting and

God-manifesting acts: As long as I am in the world I am the Light of

the world.'

Thus, moved by sorrow, recognising in man's misery the dumb cry for

help, seeing in it the opportunity for the manifestation of the higher

mercy of God; taking all evil to be the occasion for a brighter display

of the love and the good which are divine; feeling that His one purpose

upon earth was to crowd the moments with obedience to the will, and

with the doing of the works of Him that sent Him; and possessing the

sole and strange consciousness that from His person streams out all the

light which illuminates the world--the Christ pauses before the

unconscious blind man, and looking upon the poor, useless eyeballs,

unaware how near light and sight stood, obeys the impulse that shapes

His whole life, and when He had spoken thus,' proceeds to the strange

cure.

II. So we come, in the next place, to consider Christ as veiling His

power under material means.

There is only one other instance in the Gospels where a miracle is

wrought in the singular fashion which is here employed, namely, the

healing of the deaf-mute recorded in Mark's Gospel, where, in like

manner, our Lord makes clay of the spittle, and anoints the ears of the

deaf man with the clay. The variety of method in our Lord's miracles

serves important purposes, as teaching us that the methods are nothing,

and that He moved freely amongst them all, the real cause in every case

being one and the same, the bare forth-putting of His will; and

teaching us further that in each specific case there were reasons in

the moral and religious condition of the persons operated upon for the

adoption of the specific means employed, which we of course have no

means of discovering. There is here, first then, healing by material

means. The clay had no power of healing; the water of Siloam had no

power of healing. The thing that healed was Christ's will, but He uses

these externals to help the poor blind man to believe that he is going

to be healed. He condescends to drape and veil His power in order that

the dim eye, unaccustomed to the light, may look upon that shadowed

representation of it when it could not gaze upon the pure brightness;

as an eye may look upon a shaded lamp which could not bear its

brilliance unsoftened and naked.

This healing by material means in order to accommodate Himself to the

weak faith which He seeks to evoke, and to strengthen thereby, is

parallel, in principle, to His own Incarnation, and to His appointment

of external rites and ordinances. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, a visible

Church, outward means of worship, and so on, all these come under that

same category. There is no life nor power in them except His will works

through them, but they are crutches and helps for a weak and

sense-bound faith to climb to the apprehension of the spiritual

reality. It is not the clay, it is not the water, it is not the Church,

the ordinances, the outward worship, the form of prayer, the

sacrament--it is none of these things that have the healing and the

grace in them. They are only ladders by which we may ascend to Him. So

let us neither presumptuously antedate the time when we shall be able

to do without them--the Heaven in which there is no Temple'--nor

grovellingly and superstitiously elevate them to a place of importance

and of power in the Christian life which Christ never meant them to

fill. He heals through material means; the true source of healing is

His own loving will.

Further, He heals at a distance. We have here a parallel with the story

of the nobleman's son at Capernaum, which we have already considered.

There, too, we have the same phenomenon, the healing power sent forth

from the Master, and operating far away from His corporeal personal

presence. This was a test of faith, as the use of the clay had been a

help to faith. Still He works His healing from afar, because to Him

there is neither near nor far. In His divine ubiquity, that Son of Man,

who in His glorified manhood is at the right hand of God the Father

Almighty, is here and everywhere where there are weakness and suffering

that turn to Him; ready to help, ready to bless and heal. Lo, I am with

you always, even unto the end of the world.'

Our Evangelist sees in the very name of that fountain in which the man

washed, a symbol which is not to be passed by. Go, wash in the Pool of

Siloam,' which, says John, is by interpretation, Sent.' We have heard

already about the Pool of Siloam in this section of the Gospel. In

Chapter vii. we read, In the last day, that great day of the Feast,

Jesus stood and said, "If any man thirst let him come to Me and

drink."' These words were probably spoken on the last day of the Feast

of Tabernacles, on which one part of the ceremonial was the drawing,

with exuberant rejoicing, of water from the Pool of Siloam, and bearing

it up to the Temple. In these words Christ pointed to that fountain

which rises fast by the oracles of God,' and wells up from beneath the

hill, that on which the Temple is built, as being a symbol of Himself.

And here the Evangelist would have us suppose that, in like manner, the

very name which the fountain bore (whether as being an outgush from

beneath the Temple rock, or whether as being the gift of God) as

applicable to Himself. The lesson to be learned is that the fountain in

which we have to be cleansed from sin and from uncleanness,' whose

waters are the lotion that will give eyesight to the blind, the true

fountain of perpetual youth,' which men have sought for in every land,

is Christ Himself. In Him we have the welling forth of the heart of

God, the water of life, the water of gladness, the immortal stream of

which whoso drinketh shall never thirst,' and which, touching the blind

eyeballs, washes away obscuration and gives new power of vision.

III. Then, still further, we have here our Lord suspending healing on

obedience.

Go and wash.' As He said to the impotent man: Stretch forth thine

hand'; as He said to the paralytic in this Gospel: Take up thy bed and

walk'; so here He says, Go and wash.' And some friendly hand being

stretched out to the blind man, or he himself feeling his way over the

familiar path, he comes to the pool and washes, and returns seeing.

There is a double lesson there, on which I have no need to dwell. There

is, first, the general truth that healing is suspended by Christ on

compliance with His conditions. He does not simply say to any man, Be

whole. He could and did say so sometimes in regard to bodily healing.

But He cannot do so as regards the cure of our blind souls. To the

sin-sick and sin-blinded man He says, Thou shalt be whole, if'--or I

will make thee whole, provided that'--what?--provided that thou goest

to the fountain where He has lodged the healing power. The condition on

which sight comes to the blind is compliance with Christ's invitation,

Come to Me; trust in Me; and thou shalt be whole.'

Then there is a special lesson here, and that is, Obedience brings

sight. If any man will do His will he shall know of the doctrine.' Are

there any of you groping in darkness, compassed about with theological

perplexities and religious doubts? Obey what you know. Do what you see

clearly you ought to do. Bow your wills to the recognised truth. He who

has turned all his knowledge into action will get more knowledge as

soon as he needs it. Go and wash; and he went, and came seeing.'

IV. And now, lastly, we have here our Lord shadowing His highest work

as the Healer of blind souls.

It is impossible for me to enter upon that wonderfully dramatic and

instructive narrative which follows the account of the miracle, and

describe the controversies between the sturdy, quick-witted, candid,

blind man, and the narrow, bitter Pharisees. But just notice one or two

points.

The two parties are evidently represented as types of two contrasted

classes. The blind man stands for an example of honest ignorance,

knowing itself ignorant, and not to be coaxed or frightened or in any

way provoked to pretending to knowledge which it does not possess;

firmly holding by what it does know, and because conscious of its

little knowledge, therefore waiting for light and willing to be led.

Hence he is at once humble and sturdy, docile and independent, ready to

listen to any voice which can really teach, and formidably quick to

prick with wholesome sarcasm the inflated claims of mere official

pretenders. The Pharisees, on the other hand, are sure that they know

everything that can be known about anything in the region of religion

and morality, and in their absolute confidence of their absolute

possession of the truth, in their blank unconsciousness that it was

more than their official property and stock-in-trade, in their complete

incapacity to discern the glory of a miracle which contravened

ecclesiastical proprieties and conventionalities, in their contempt for

the ignorance which they were responsible for and never thought of

enlightening, in their cruel taunt directed against the man's calamity,

and in their swift resort to the weapon of excommunication of one whom

it was much easier to cast out than to answer, are but too plain a type

of a character which is as ready to corrupt the teachers of the Church

as of the synagogue.

One cannot but notice how constantly the phrase We know' occurs. The

parents of the man use it thrice. The Pharisees have it on their lips

in their first interview with him: We know that this man is a sinner.'

He answers, declining to affirm anything about the character of the Man

Jesus, because he, for his part, knows not,' but standing firmly by the

solid reality which he knows,' in a very solid fashion, that his eyes

have been opened. So we have the first encounter between knowledge

which is ignorant, and ignorance which knows, to the manifest victory

of the latter. Again, in the second round, they try to overbear the

man's cool sarcasm with their vehement assertion of knowledge that God

spake to Moses, but by the admission that even their knowledge did not

reach to the determination of the question of the origin of Jesus'

mission, lay themselves open to the sudden thrust of keen-eyed, honest

humility's sharp rapier-like retort. Herein is a marvellous thing,'

that you Know-alls, whose business it is to know where a professed

miracle-worker comes from, know not from whence He is, and yet He hath

opened mine eyes.' Now we know' (to use your own words) that God

heareth not sinners, but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth

His will, him He heareth.'

Then observe how, on both sides, a process is going on. The man is

getting more and more light at each step. He begins with a Man which is

called Jesus.' Then he gets to a prophet,' then he comes to a

worshipper of God, and one that does His will.' Then he comes to, If

this man were not of God,' in some very special sense, He could do

nothing.' These are his own reflections, the working out of the

impression made by the fact on an honest mind; and because he had so

used the light which he had, therefore Jesus gives him more, and finds

him with the question, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' Then the

man who had shown himself so strong in his own convictions, so

independent, and hard to cajole or coerce, shows himself now all docile

and submissive, and ready to accept whatever Jesus says: Lord, who is

He, that I might believe on Him?' That was not credulity. He already

knew enough of Christ to know that he ought to trust Him. And to his

docility there is given the full revelation; and he hears the words

which Pharisees and unrighteous men were not worthy to hear: Thou hast

both seen it is He that talketh with thee.' Then intellectual

conviction, moral reliance, and the utter prostration and devotion of

the whole man bow him at Christ's feet. Lord, I believe; and He

worshipped Him.'

There is the story of the progress of an honest, ignorant soul that

knew itself blind, into the illumination of perfect vision.

And as he went upwards, so steadily and tragically, downwards went the

others. For they had light and they would not look at it; and it

blasted and blinded them. They had the manifestation of Christ, and

they scoffed and jeered at it, and turned their backs upon it, and it

became a curse to them; falling not like dew but like vitriol on their

spirits, blistering, not refreshing.

Therefore Christ pronounces their fate, and sums up the story in the

solemn two-edged sentence: For judgment am I come into the world, that

they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made

blind.'

The purpose of His coming is not to judge, but to save. But if men will

not let Him save, the effect of His coming will be to harm. Therefore,

His coming will separate men into two parts, as a magnet will draw all

the iron filings out of a heap and leave the brass. He comes not to

judge, but His coming does judge. He is set for the rise or for the

fall of men, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the

heart.'

Light has a twofold effect. It is torture to the diseased eye; it is

gladdening to the sound one. Christ is the light, as He is also both

the power of seeing and the thing seen. Therefore, it cannot but be

that His shining upon men's hearts shall judge them, and shall either

enlighten or darken.

We all have eyes--the organs by which we may see the light of the

knowledge of the glory of God.' We have all blinded ourselves by our

sin. Christ is come to show us God, to be the light by which we see

God, and to strengthen and restore our faculty of seeing Him. If you

welcome Him, and take Him into your hearts, He will be at once light

and eyesight to you. But if you turn away from Him He will be blindness

and darkness to you. He comes to pour eyesight on the blind, but He

comes therefore also, most assuredly, to make still blinder those who

do not know themselves to be blind, and conceit themselves to be

clear-sighted. I thank Thee, Father, that Thou hast hid these things

from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.'

They who see themselves to be blind, who know themselves to be

ignorant, the lowly who recognise their sinfulness and misery and

helplessness, and turn in their sore need to Christ, will be led by

paths of growing knowledge and blessedness to the perfect day where

their strengthened vision will be able to see light in the blaze which

to us now is darkness. They who say I see,' and know not that they are

miserable and blind, nor hearken to His counsel to anoint their eyes

with eye salve that they may see,' will have yet another film drawn

over their eyes by the shining of the light which they reject, and will

pass into darkness where only enough of light and of eyesight remain to

make guilt. Jesus Christ is for us light and vision. Trust to Him, and

your eyes will be blessed because they see God. Turn from Him and

Egyptian darkness will settle on your soul. To him that hath shall be

given, and from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be

taken away.'

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THE GIFTS TO THE FLOCK

. . . By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and

out, and find pasture.'--JOHN x. 9.

One does not know whether the width or the depth of this marvellous

promise is the more noteworthy. Jesus Christ presents Himself before

the whole race of man, and declares Himself able to deal with the needs

of every individual in the tremendous whole. If any man'--no matter

who, where, when.

For all noble and happy life there are at least three things needed:

security, sustenance, and a field for the exercise of activity. To

provide these is the end of all human society and government. Jesus

Christ here says that He can give all these to every one.

The imagery of the sheep and the fold is still, of course, in His mind,

and colours the form of the representation. But the substance is the

declaration that, to any and every soul, no matter how ringed about

with danger, no matter how hampered and hindered in work, no matter how

barren of all supply earth may be, He will give these, the primal

requisites of life. He shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and

find pasture.'

Now I only wish to deal with these three aspects of the blessedness of

a true Christian life which our Lord holds forth here as accessible to

us all: security, the unhindered exercise of activity, and sustenance

or provision.

I. First, then, in and through Christ any man may be saved.

I take it that the word saved' here is rather used with reference to

the imagery of the parable than in its full Christian sense of ultimate

and everlasting salvation, and that its meaning in its present

connection might perhaps better be set forth by the rendering safe'

than saved.' At the same time, the two ideas pass into one another; and

the declaration of my text is that because, step by step, conflict by

conflict, in passing danger after danger, external and internal, Jesus

Christ, through our union with Him, will keep us safe, at the last we

shall reach eternal and everlasting salvation. He will save us' by the

continual exercise of His protecting power, into His everlasting

kingdom.' There is none other shelter for men's defenceless heads and

naked, soft, unarmed bodies except only the shelter that is found in

Him. There are creatures of low grade in the animal world which have

the instinct, because their own bodies are so undefended and impotent

to resist contact with sharp and penetrating substances, that they take

refuge in the abandoned shells of other creatures. You and I have to

betake ourselves behind the defences of that strong love and mighty

Hand if ever we are to pass through life without fatal harm.

For consider that, even in regard to outward dangers, union with Jesus

Christ defends and delivers us. Suppose two men, two Manchester

merchants, made bankrupt by the same commercial crisis; or two

shipwrecked sailors lashed upon a raft; or two men sitting side by side

in a railway carriage and smashed by the same collision. One is a

Christian and the other is not. The same blow is altogether different

in aspect and actual effect upon the two men. They endure the same

thing externally, in body or in fortune. The outward man is similarly

affected, but the man is differently affected. The one is crushed, or

embittered, or driven to despair, or to drink, or to something or other

to soothe the bitterness; the other bows himself with It is the Lord!

Let Him do what seemeth Him good.'

So the two disasters are utterly different, though in form they may be

the same, and he that has entered into the fold by Jesus Christ is

safe, not from outward disaster--that would be but a poor thing--but in

it. For to the true heart that lives in fellowship with Jesus Christ,

Sorrow, though it be dark-robed, is bright-faced, soft-handed,

gentle-hearted, an angel of God. By Me if any man enter in, he shall be

safe.'

And further, in our union with Jesus Christ, by simple faith in Him and

loyal submission and obedience, we do receive an impenetrable defence

against the true evils, and the only things worth calling dangers. For

the only real evil is the peril that we shall lose our confidence and

be untrue to our best selves, and depart from the living God. Nothing

is evil except that which tempts, and succeeds in tempting, us away

from Him. And in regard to all such danger, to cleave to Christ, to

realise His presence, to think of Him, to wear His name as an amulet on

our hearts, to put the thought of Him between us and temptation as a

filter through which the poisonous air shall pass, and be deprived of

its virus, is the one secret of safety and victory.

Real gift of power from Jesus Christ, the influx of His strength into

our weakness, of some portion of the Spirit of life that was in Him

into our deadness, is promised, and the promise is abundantly fulfilled

to all men who trust Him when their hour of temptation comes. As the

dying martyr, when he looked up into heaven, saw Jesus Christ standing

at the right hand of God' ready to help, and, as it were, having

started from His eternal seat on the Throne in the eagerness of His

desire to succour His servant, so we may all see, if we will, that dear

Lord ready to succour us, and close by our sides to deliver us from the

evil in the evil, its power to tempt. If we could carry that vision

into our daily life, and walk in its light, when temptation rings us

round, how poor all the inducements to go away from Him would look!

There is a power in the remembrance of Jesus to slay every wicked

thought; and the things that tempt us most, that most directly appeal

to our worst sides, to our sense, our ambition, our pride, our

distrust, our self-will, all these lose their power upon us, and are

discovered in their emptiness and insignificance, when once this

thought flashes across the mind--Jesus Christ is my Defence, and Jesus

Christ is my Pattern and my Companion.

Oh, brother! do not trust yourself out amongst the pitfalls and snares

of life without Him. If you do, the real evil of all evils will seize

you for its own; but keep close to that dear Lord, and then there shall

no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.'

The hidden temptation thou wilt pass by without being harmed; the

manifest temptation thou wilt trample under foot. Thou shalt not be

afraid for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the

destruction that wasteth at noonday.' Hidden known temptations will be

equally powerless; and in the fold into which all pass by faith in

Christ thou shalt be safe. And so, kept safe from each danger and in

each moment of temptation, the aggregate and sum of the several

deliverances will amount to the everlasting salvation which shall be

perfected in the heavens.

Only remember the condition, By Me if any man enter in.' That is not a

thing to be done once for all, but needs perpetual repetition. When we

clasp anything in our hands, however tight the initial grasp, unless

there is a continual effort of renewed tightening, the muscles become

lax, and we have to renew the tension, if we are to keep the grasp. So

in our Christian life it is only the continual repetition of the act

which our Lord here calls entering in by Him' that will bring to us

this continual exemption from, and immunity in, the dangers that beset

us.

Keep Christ between you and the storm. Keep on the lee side of the Rock

of Ages. Keep behind the breakwater, for there is a wild sea running

outside; and your little boat, undecked and with a feeble hand at the

helm, will soon be swamped. Keep within the fold, for wolves and lions

lie in every bush. Or, in plain English, live moment by moment in the

realising of Christ's presence, power, and grace. So, and only so,

shall you be safe.

II. Now, secondly, note, in Jesus Christ any man may find a field for

the unrestricted exercise of his activity.

That metaphor of going in and out' is partly explained to us by the

image of the flock, which passes into the fold for peaceful repose, and

out again, without danger, for exercise and food; and is partly

explained by the frequent use, in the Old Testament and in common

conversation, of the expression going out and in' as the designation of

the two-sided activity of human life. The one side is the contemplative

life of interior union with God by faith and love; the other, the

active life of practical obedience in the field of work which God

provides for us. These two are both capable of being raised to their

highest power, and of being discharged with the most unrestricted and

joyous activity, on condition of our keeping close to Christ, and

living by the faith of Him.

Note, then, He shall go in.' That comes first, though it interferes

with the propriety of the metaphor, since the previous words already

contemplate an initial entering in by Me, the Door.' That is to say,

that, given the union with Jesus Christ by faith, there must then, as

the basis of all activity, follow very frequent and deep inward acts of

contemplation, of faith, and aspiration, and desire. You must go into

the depths of God through Christ. You must go into the depths of your

own souls through Him. You must become accustomed to withdraw

yourselves from spreading yourselves out over the distractions of any

external activity, howsoever imperative, charitable, or necessary, and

live alone with Jesus, in the secret place of the Most High.' It is

through Him that we have access to the mysteries and innermost shrine

of the Temple. It is through Him that we draw near to the depths of

Deity. It is through Him that we learn the length and breadth and

height and depth of the largest and loftiest and noblest truths that

concern the spirit. It is through Him that we become familiar with the

inmost secrets of our own selves. And only they who habitually live

this hidden and sunken life of solitary and secret communion will ever

do much in the field of outward work. Christians of this generation are

far too much accustomed to live only in the front rooms of the house,

that look out upon the street; and they know very little--far too

little for their soul's health, and far too little for the freshness of

their work and its prosperity--of that inward life of silent

contemplation and expectant adoration, by which all strength is fed. Do

not keep all your goods in the shop windows, and have nothing on your

shelves but dummies, as is the case with far too many of us to-day.

Remember that the Lord said first, He shall go in,' and unless you do

you will not be saved.'

But then, further, if there have been, and continue to be, this

unrestricted exercise through Christ of that sweet and silent life of

solitary communion with Him, then there will follow upon that an

enlargement of opportunity, and power for outward service such as

nothing but emancipation by faith in Him can ever bring. Howsoever, by

external circumstances, you and I may be hampered and hindered, however

often we may feel that if something outside of us were different, the

development of our active powers would be far more satisfactory, and we

could do a great deal more in Christ's cause, the true hindrance lies

never without, but within; and it is only to be overcome by that

plunging into the depths of fellowship with Him. And then, if we carry

with us into the field of work, whether it be the commonplace, dusty,

tedious, and often repulsive duties of our monotonous business; or

whether it be the field of more distinctly unselfish and Christian

service--if we carry with us into all places where we go to labour, the

sweet thought of His presence, of His example, of His love, and of the

smile that may come on His face as the reward of faithful service, then

we shall find that external labour, drawing its pattern, its motive,

its law, and the power for its discharge, from communion with Him, is

no more task-work nor slavery; and even the rough places will be made

smooth, and the crooked things will be made straight,' and distasteful

work will be made at least tolerable, and hard burdens will be

lightened, and the things that are seen and temporal' will shimmer into

transparency, through which will shine out the things that are unseen

and eternal.'

Some of us are constitutionally made to prefer the one of these forms

of Christian activity; some of us to prefer the other. The tendencies

of this generation are far too much to the latter, to the exclusion of

the former. It is hard to reconcile the conflicting claims, and I know

of no better way to hit the just medium than by trying to keep

ourselves always in touch with Jesus Christ, and then outward labour of

any sort, whether for the bread that perishes or for His kingdom and

righteousness, will never become so absorbing but that in it we may

have our hearts in heaven, and the silent hour of communion with Him

will never be so prolonged as to neglect outward duties. There was a

demoniac boy in the plain, and therefore it was impossible to build

tabernacles on the Mount of Transfiguration. But the disciples that had

not climbed the Mount were all impotent to cast out the demoniac boy.

We, if we keep near to Jesus Christ, will find that through Him we can

go in and out,' and in both be pursuing the one uniform purpose of

serving and pleasing Him. So shall be fulfilled in our cases the

Psalmist's prayer, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the

days of ray life, to behold His beauty, and to inquire in His Temple.'

III. Lastly, in Jesus Christ any man may receive sustenance. They shall

find pasture.'

The imagery of the sheep and the fold is still, of course, present to

the Master's mind, and shapes the form in which this great promise is

set forth.

I need only remind you, in illustration of it, of two facts, one, that

in Jesus Christ Himself all the true needs of humanity are met and

satisfied. He is the Bread of God that came down from heaven to give

life to the world.' Do I want an outward object for my intellect? I

have it in Him. Does my heart feel with its tendrils, which have no

eyes at the ends of them, after something round which it may twine, and

not fear that the prop shall ever rot or be cut down or pulled up?

Jesus Christ is the home of love in which the dove may fold its wings

and be at rest. Do I want (and I do if I am not a fool) an absolute and

authoritative command to be laid upon my will; some one whose looks

enjoin, whose lightest words are spells'? I find absolute authority,

with no taint of tyranny, and no degradation to the subject, in that

Infinite Will of His. Does my conscience need some strong detergent to

be laid upon it which shall take out the stains that are most

indurated, inveterate, and ingrained? I find it only in the blood that

cleanseth from all sin.' Do my aspirations and desires seek for some

solid and substantial and unquestionable and imperishable good to

which, reaching out, they may be sure that they are not anchoring on

cloudland? Christ is our hope. For all this complicated and craving

commonwealth that I carry within my soul, there is but one

satisfaction, even Jesus Christ Himself. Nothing else nourishes the

whole man at once, but in Him are all the constituents that the human

system requires for its nutriment and its growth in every part. So in

and through Christ we find pasture.'

But beyond that, if we are knit to Him by simple and continual faith,

love, and obedience, then what is else barrenness becomes full of

nourishment, and the unsatisfying gifts of the world become rich and

precious. They are nought when they are put first, they are much when

they are put second.

I remember when I was in Australia seeing some wretched cattle trying

to find grass on a yellow pasture where there was nothing but here and

there a brown stalk that crumbled to dust in their mouths as they tried

to eat it. That is the world without Jesus Christ. And I saw the same

pasture six weeks after, when the rains had come, and the grass was

high, rich, juicy, satisfying. That is what the world may be to you, if

you will put it second, and seek first that your souls shall be fed on

Jesus Christ. Then, and only then, will what is else water be turned by

His touch and blessing into wine that shall fill the great jars to the

brim, and be pronounced by skilled palates to be the good wine. I will

feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel

shall their fold be. There shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat

pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.'

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THE GOOD SHEPHERD

I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. 15. As

the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My

life for the sheep.'--JOHN x. 14, 15.

I am the Good Shepherd.' Perhaps even Christ never spoke more fruitful

words than these. Just think how many solitary, wearied hearts they

have cheered, and what a wealth of encouragement and comfort there has

been in them for all generations. The little child as it lays itself

down to sleep, cries--

Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me,

Bless Thy little lamb to-night,'

and the old man lays himself down to die murmuring to himself, Though I

walk through the valley of the shadow of Death, I will fear no evil,

for Thou art with me.' I am the Good Shepherd.' No preaching can do

anything but weaken and dilute the force of such words, and yet, though

in all their sweet, homely simplicity they appeal to every heart, there

are great depths in them that are worth pondering, and profound

thoughts that need some elucidation.

There are three points to be noticed--First, the general force of the

metaphor, and then the two specific applications of it which our Lord

Himself makes.

I. First of all, then, let me say a few words as to the general

application of the metaphor. The usual notion of these words confines

itself to the natural meaning, and runs out into very true, but perhaps

a little sentimental, considerations, laying hold of what is so plain

on the very surface that I need not spend any time in speaking about

it. Christ's pattern is my law; Christ's providence is my guidance and

defence--which in the present case means Christ's companionship--is my

safety, my sustenance--which in the present case means that Christ

Himself is the bread of my soul. The Good Shepherd exercises care,

which absolves the sheep from care, and in the present case means that

my only duty is meek following and quiet trust. I am the Good

Shepherd'--here is guidance, guardianship, companionship,

sustenance--all responsibility laid upon His broad shoulders, and all

tenderness in His deep heart, and so for us simple obedience and quiet

trust.

Another way by which we get the whole significance of this symbol is by

noticing how the idea is strengthened by the word that accompanies it.

Christ does not say I am a Shepherd,' but He says, I am the good

Shepherd.' At first sight that word good' is interpreted, as I have

said, in a kind of sentimental, poetic way, as expressing our Lord's

tenderness and love and care; but I do not think that is the full

meaning here. You find up and down this Gospel of St. John phrases such

as, I am the true bread,' I am the true vine,' and the meaning of the

word that is here translated good' is very nearly parallel with that

idea. The true bread, the true vine, the true Shepherd--which comes to

this, to use modern phraseology, that Jesus Christ, in His relation to

you and me, fulfils all that in figure and shadow is represented to the

meditative eye by that lower relationship between the material shepherd

and his sheep. That is the picture, this the reality. There is another

point to be made clear, and that is, that whilst the word good' is

perhaps a fair enough representation of that which is employed by our

Lord, there is a special force and significance attached to the

original, which is lost in our Bible. I do not know that it could have

been preserved; but still it is necessary to state it. The expression

here is the one that is generally rendered fair,' or lovely,' or

beautiful,' and it belongs to the genius of that wonderful tongue in

which the New Testament is written that it has a name for moral purity,

considered as being lovely, the highest goodness, and the serenest

beauty, which was what the old Greeks taught, howsoever little they may

have practised it in their lives. And so here the thought is that the

Shepherd stands before us, the realisation of all which that name

means, set forth in such a fashion as to be infinitely lovely and

perfectly fair, and to draw the admiration of any man who can

appreciate that which is beautiful, and can admire that which is of

good report.

There is another point still in reference to this first view of the

text. Our Lord not only declares that He is the reality of which the

earthly shepherd is the shadow, and that He as such is the flawless,

perfect One, but that He alone is the reality. I am the Good Shepherd;

in Me and in Me alone is that which men need.' And that leads me to

another point which must just be mentioned, that we shall not reach the

full meaning of these great words without taking into account the

history of the metaphor in the Old Testament. Christ gives a second

edition of the figure, and we are to remember all that went before. The

Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want'; Thou leddest Thy people like a

flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.' These are but specimens of a

continuous series of utterances in the old Revelation in which Jehovah

Himself is the Shepherd of mankind; and there is also another class of

passages of which I will quote one or two. He shall feed His flock like

a shepherd, and carry them in His arms.' Awake, O sword, against the

Man who is my fellow; smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be

scattered.' There were, we should remember, two streams of

representation, according to the one of which God Himself was the

Shepherd of Israel, and according to the other of which the Messiah was

the Shepherd; and here, as I believe, Jesus lays His hand on both the

one and the other, and says: They are Mine, and they testify of Me.' So

sweet, so gracious are the words, that we lose the sense of the

grandeur of them, and need to think before we are able to understand

how great and immense the claim that is made here upon our faith, and

that this Man stands before us and arrogates to Himself the divine

prerogative witnessed from of old by psalmist and prophet, and says

that for Him were meant the prophecies of ancient times that spake of a

human shepherd, and asserts that all the sustenance, care, authority,

command, which the emblem suggests meet in Him in perfect measure.

II. Now let us turn to the two special points which our Lord emphasises

here, as being those in which His relation as the Good Shepherd is most

conspicuously given. The language of my text runs: I am the Good

Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As the Father

knoweth Me, even so know I the Father.' Our Western ways fail to bring

out the full meaning of the emblem; but all Eastern travellers tell us

what a strange bond of sympathy and loving regard, and docile

recognition, springs up between the shepherd and his sheep away there

in the Eastern pastures and deserts; and how he knows every one, though

to a stranger's eye they are so like each other; and how even the dumb

instincts and the narrow intelligence of the silly sheep recognise the

shepherd, and will not be deceived by shepherd's garments worn to

deceive, and will not follow the voice of a stranger.

But we must further note that Christ lays hold of the dumb instincts of

the animal, as illustrating, at the one end of the scale, the relation

between Him and His followers, and lays hold of the communion between

the Father and the Son at the other end of the scale, as illustrating

the same thing. I know My sheep.' That is a knowledge like the

knowledge of the shepherd, a bond of close intimacy. But He does not

know them by reason of looking at them and thinking about them. It is

something far more blessed than that. He knows me because He loves me;

He knows me because He has sympathy with me, and I know Him, if I know

Him at all, by my love, and I know Him by my sympathy, and I know Him

by my communion. A loveless heart does not know the Shepherd, and

unless the Shepherd's heart was all love He would not know His sheep.

The Shepherd's love is an individualised love. He knows His flock as a

flock because He knows the units of it, and we can rest ourselves upon

the personal knowledge, which is personal love and sympathy, of Jesus

Christ. And My sheep know Me'--not by force of intellect, not by

understanding certain truths, all-important as that may be, but by

having our hearts harmonised in Him, and our spirits put into sympathy

and communion with Him. They know Me,' and rest comes with the

knowledge; they know Me,' and in that knowing is the best answer to all

doubt and fear. They are exposed to danger, but in the fold they can go

quietly to rest, for they know that He is at the door watching through

all dangers.

III. Turn for a moment to the last point, I lay down My life for the

sheep.' I have said that our Western ways fail to bring out fully the

element of the metaphor which refers to the kind of sympathy between

the shepherd and the sheep; and our Western life also fails to bring

out this other element also. Shepherds in England never have need to

lay down their life for the sheep. Shepherds in Palestine often did,

and sometimes do. You remember David with the lion and the bear, which

is but an illustration of the reality which underlies this metaphor.

So, then, in some profound way, the shepherd's death is the sheep's

safety. First of all, look at that most unmistakable, emphatic--I was

going to say vehement, at any rate, intense--expression of the absolute

voluntariness of Christ's death, I lay down My life,' as a man might

strip off a vesture. And this application of the metaphor is made all

the stronger by the words which follow: Therefore doth My Father love

Me, because I lay down My life that I might take it again. No man

taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it

down, and I have power to take it again.' We read, Smite the shepherd,

and the sheep shall be scattered,' but here, somehow or other, the

smiting of the Shepherd is not the scattering but the gathering of the

flock. Here, somehow or other, the dead Shepherd has power to guard, to

guide, to defend them. Here, somehow or other, the death of the

Shepherd is the security of the sheep; and I say to you, the flock,

that for every soul the entrance into the flock of God is through the

door of the dying Christ, who laid down His life for the sheep, and

makes them His sheep who trust in Him.

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OTHER SHEEP' [1]

Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring,

and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock and one

Shepherd.'--JOHN x. 16 (R.V.).

There were many strange and bitter lessons in this discourse for the

false shepherds, the Pharisees, to whom it was first spoken. But there

was not one which would jar more upon their minds, and as they fancied,

on their sacredest convictions, than this, that God's flock was wider

than God's fold. Our Lord distinctly recognises Judaism with its middle

wall of partition as a divine institution, and then as distinctly

carries His gaze beyond it. To His hearers this fold,' their own

national polity, held all the flock. Without were dogs, a doleful land,

where the wild beasts of the desert met with the wild beasts of the

islands.' And now this new Teacher, not content with declaring them

hirelings, and Himself the only true Shepherd of Israel, breaks down

the hedges and speaks of Himself as the Shepherd of men. No wonder that

they said, He hath a devil and is mad.'

During His earthly life our Lord, as we know, confined His own personal

ministry for the most part to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Not exclusively so, for He made at least one journey into the coasts of

Tyre and Sidon, teaching and healing; a Syro-Phoenician woman held His

feet, and received her request; and one of His miracles, of feeding the

multitude, was wrought for hungry Gentiles. But while His work was in

Israel, it was for mankind; and while this fold,' generally speaking,

circumscribed His toils, it did not confine His love nor His thoughts.

More than once world-wide declarations and promises broke from His

lips, even before the final universal commission, Preach the Gospel to

every creature.' I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.' I am

the Light of the world.' These and other similar sayings give us His

lofty consciousness that He has received the heathen for His

inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession.'

Parallel with them in substance are the words before us, which, for our

present purpose, we may regard as containing lessons from our Lord

Himself of how He looked and would have us look on the heathen world,

on His work and ours, and on the certain issues of both.

I. We have here Christ teaching us how to think of the heathen world.

Observe that His words are not a declaration that all mankind are His

sheep. The previous verses have distinctly defined a class of men as

possessing the name, and the succeeding ones reiterate the definition,

and with equal distinctness exclude another class. Ye believe not,

because ye are not My sheep as I said unto you.' His sheep are they who

know Him and are known of Him. Between Him and them there is a

communion of love, a union of life, and a consequent reciprocal

knowledge, which transcends the closest intimacies of earthly life, and

finds its only analogue in that deep and mysterious oneness which

subsists between the Father, who alone knoweth the Son, and the only

begotten Son, who being ever in the bosom of the Father, alone knoweth

Him and revealeth Him to us. I know My sheep and am known of Mine; as

the Father knoweth Me and I know the Father. They hear My voice and

follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life.' Such are the

characteristics of that relation between Christ and men by which they

become His sheep. It is such souls as these whom our Lord beholds in

the wasteful wilderness. He is speaking not of a relation which all men

bear to Him by virtue of their creation, but of one which they bear to

Him who believe in His name.

Now this interpretation of the words does by no means contradict, but

rather presupposes and rests upon the truth that all mankind come

within the love of the divine heart, that He died for all, that all may

be the subjects of His mediatorial kingdom, recipients of the offered

mercy of God in Christ, and committed to the stewardship of the

missionary Church. Resting upon these truths, the words of our text

advance a step further and contemplate those who shall hereafter

believe on Me.' Whether they be few or many is not the matter in hand.

Whether at any future time they shall include all the dwellers upon

earth is not the matter in hand. That every soul of man is included in

the adaptation and intention and offer of the Gospel is not the matter

in hand. But this is the matter in hand, that Jesus Christ in that

moment of lofty elevation when He looked onwards to giving His life for

the sheep, looked outwards also, far afield, and saw in every nation

and people souls that He knew were His, and would one day know Him, and

be led by Him in green pastures and beside still waters.'

But where or what were they when He spoke? He does not mean that

already they had heard His voice and were following His steps, and knew

His love, and had received eternal life at His hand. This He cannot

mean, for the plain reason that He goes on to speak of His bringing'

them and of their hearing,' a work yet to be done. It can only be,

then, that He speaks of them thus in the fullness of that divine

knowledge which calls things that are not as though they were.' It is

then a prophetic word which He speaks here.

We have only to think of the condition of the civilised heathendom of

Christ's own day in order to feel the force of our text in its primary

application. While the work of salvation was being prepared for the

world in the life and death of our Lord, the world was being prepared

for the tidings of salvation. Everywhere men were losing their faith in

their idols, and longing for some deliverer. Some had become weary of

the hollowness of philosophical speculation, and, like Pilate, were

asking What is truth?' whilst, unlike Him, they waited for an answer,

and will believe it when it comes from the lips of the Incarnate

wisdom. Such were the Magi who were led by their starry science to His

cradle, and went back to the depths of the Eastern lands with a better

light than had guided them thither. Such were not a few of the early

Christian converts, who had long been seeking hopelessly for goodly

pearls, and had so been learning to know the worth of the One when it

was offered to them. There were men who had been long sickening with

despair amidst the rottenness of decaying mythologies and corrupting

morals, and longing for some breath from heaven to blow health to

themselves and to the world, and had so been learning to welcome the

rushing mighty wind' when it came in power. There were simple souls,

without as well as within the chosen people, waiting for the

Consolation, though they knew not whence it was to come. There were

many who had already learned to believe that salvation is of the Jews,'

though they had still to learn that salvation is in Jesus. Such were

that Aethiopian statesman who was poring over Isaiah when Philip joined

him, the Roman centurion at Caesarea whose prayers and alms came up

with acceptance before God, these Greeks of the West who came to His

cross as the Eastern sages to His cradle, and were in Christ's eyes the

advance guard and first scattered harbingers of the flocks who should

come flying for refuge to Him lifted on the Cross, like doves to their

windows.' The whole world showed that the fullness of time had come;

and the history of the early years of the Church reveals in how many

souls the process of preparation had been silently going on. It was

like the flush of early spring, when all the buds that had been

maturing and swelling in the cold, burst, and the tender flowers that

had been reaching upwards to the surface in all the hard winter laugh

out in beauty, and a green veil covers all the hedges at the first

flash of the April sun.

Not only these were in our Lord's thoughts when He saw His sheep in

heathen lands. There were many who had no such previous preparation,

but were plunged in all the darkness, nor knew that it was dark. Not

only those wearied of idolatry, and dissatisfied with creeds outworn,

but the barbarous people of Illyricum, the profligates of Corinth, hard

rude men like the jailer at Philippi, and many more were before His

penetrating eye. He who sees beneath the surface, and beyond the

present, beholds His sheep where men can only see wolves. He sees an

Apostle in the blaspheming Saul, a teacher for all generations in the

African Augustine while yet a sensualist and a Manichee, a reformer in

the eager monk Luther, a poet-evangelist in the tinker Bunyan. He sees

the future saint in the present sinner, the angel's wings budding on

many a shoulder where the world's burdens lie heavy, and the new name

written on many a forehead that as yet bears but the mark of the beast,

and the number of His name.

And the sheep whom He sees while He speaks are not only the men of that

generation. These mighty words are world-wide and world-lasting. The

whole of the ages are in His mind. All nations are gathered before His

prophetic vision, even as they shall one day be gathered before His

judgment throne, and in all the countless mass His hand touches and His

love clasps those who to the very end of time shall come to His call

with loving faith, shall follow His steps with glad obedience.

Thus does Christ look out upon the world that lay beyond the fold. I

cannot stay to do more than refer in passing to the spirit which the

words of our text breathe. There is the lofty consciousness that He is

the Leader and Guide, the Friend and Helper of all, that He stands

solitary in His power to bless. There is the full confidence that the

earth is His to its uttermost border. There is the clear vision of the

sorrowful condition of these heathen people, without a shepherd and

without a fold, wandering on every high mountain and dying in every

thirsty land where there is no water. There are the tenderest pity and

yearning love for them in their extremity. There is the clear assurance

that they will come and be blessed in Him. I pass by all the other

thoughts, which naturally found themselves on these words, in order to

urge the one which is most appropriate to our present engagement. Let

us, dear brethren, take Christ as our pattern in our contemplations of

the heathen world.

He has set us the example of an outgoing look directed far beyond the

limits of the existing churches, far beyond the point of present

achievement. We are but too apt to circumscribe our operative thoughts

and our warm sympathies within the circle of our sight, or of our own

personal associations. Our selfishness and our indolence affect the

objects of our contemplations quite as much as they do the character of

our work. They vitiate both, by making ourselves the great object of

both, and by weakening the force of both in a ratio that increases

rapidly with the increasing distance from that favourite centre. It is

but a subtle form of the same disease which keeps our thoughts penned

within the bounds of any fold, or limited by the progress already

achieved. For us the whole world is the possession of our Lord, who has

died to redeem us. By us the whole ought to be contemplated with that

same spirit of prophetic confidence which filled Him when He said,

Other sheep I have which are not of this fold.' To press onwards,

forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those

which are before,' is the only fitting attitude for Christian men,

either in regard to the gradual purifying of their own characters, or

in regard to the gradual winning of the world for Christ. We ought to

make all past successes stepping-stones to nobler things. The true use

of the present is to reach up from it to a loftier future. The distance

beckons; well for us if it do not beckon us in vain. We have yet to

learn the first lesson of our Master's spirit, as expressed in these

words, if we have not become familiar with the pitying contemplation of

the wastes beyond the fold, nor fixed deep in our minds the faith that

the amplitude of its walls will have to be widened with growing years

till it fills the world. The cry echoes to us from of old, Lengthen thy

cords, and strengthen thy stakes, for thou shalt break forth on the

right hand and on the left.' We take the first step to respond to the

summons when we make the regions beyond' one of the standing subjects

of our devout thoughts, and take heed of supposing that the Church as

we know it, has the same measurement which the man with the golden rod

has measured for the eternal courts of Jerusalem, that shall be the joy

of the whole earth. The very genius of the Gospel is aspiring. It is

content with nothing short of universality for the sweep, and eternity

for the duration, and absolute completeness for the measure, of its

bestowments on man. We should be like men on a voyage of discovery,

whose task is felt to be incomplete until headland after headland that

fades in the dim distance has been rounded and surveyed, and the flag

of our country planted upon it. After each has been passed another

arises from the water, onwards we must go. There is no pause for our

thoughts, none for our sympathy, none for our work, till our keels have

visited, and the shout of a King' has been heard on every shore that

fills the breadth of Thy land, O Emmanuel!' The limits of the visible

community of Christ's Church to-day are far within the borders to which

it must one day stretch. It is for us, taught by His words, to

understand that we are yet as it were but encamped by Jericho, and at

the beginning of the campaign. Ai and Bethhoron, and many a fight more

are before us yet. The camp of the invaders, when they lay around the

city of palm-trees, with the mountains in front and the Jordan behind,

was not more unlike the settled order of the nation when it filled the

land, than the ranks of Christ's army to-day are to the mighty

multitudes that shall one day name His name, and follow His banner. Let

us live in the future, and lay strongly hold on the distant; for both

are our Lord's, and by so doing we shall the better do our Master's

work in the present, and at hand.

He has set us the example of a penetrating gaze into heathenism, which

reveals beneath its monotonous miseries, the souls that are His. We

ought to look on every field of Christian effort with the assurance

that in it there are some who will hear His voice. As it was when He

came, so it is ever and everywhere. The world is being prepared for the

Gospel. In some broad regions, faith in idolatry is dying out, and the

moral condition of the people is undergoing a slow elevation.

Individuals are being weaned from their gods, they know not how, and

they will not know why till they hear of Christ. He sees in every land

where the Gospel is being taken a people prepared for the Lord.' He

sees the gold gleaming in the crevices of the caves, the gems, rough

and unpolished, lying in the matrix. He looks not merely on the great

mass of idolaters, but He sees the single souls who shall hear. It is

for us to look on the same mass with confidence caught from His.

Neither apathetic indifference nor faint-hearted doubt should be

permitted to weaken our hands. The prospect may seem very dark, the

power of the enemy very great, our resources very inadequate; but let

us look with Christ's eye, we shall know that everywhere we may hope to

find a response to our message. Who they may be, we know not. How many

they may be, we know not. How they may be guided by Him, they know not.

But He knows all. We may know that they are there. And as we cannot

tell who they are but only that they are, we are bound to cherish hopes

for all--the most degraded and outcast of our race. We have no right to

give up any field or any man as hopeless. Christ's sheep will be found

coming out of the midst of wolves and goats. Darkness may cover the

earth, and gross darkness the people; but if we look upon it as Christ

did, and as He would have us to look, we shall see lights flickering

here and there in the obscurity, which shall burst out into a blaze.

The prophetic eye, the boundlessly hopeful heart, the strong confidence

that in every land where He is preached there will be those who shall

hear--these are what He gives us when He says, Other sheep I have,

which are not of this fold.'

There is one other thought connected with these words which may be

briefly referred to. It is that even now, in all lands where the Gospel

has been preached, there are those whom Christ has received, although

they have no connection with His visible Church.

There are many goats within the fold. There are many sheep without it.

Even in lands where the Gospel has long been preached, we do not

venture to identify profession by Church fellowship with living union

with Christ. Much more is this true of our missionary efforts, and the

apparent converts whom they make. The results that appear are no

measure of the results that have actually been accomplished. We often

hear of men who had caught up some stray word in a Bengali

market-place, or received a tract by the roadside from some passing

missionary, and who, having carried away the seed in their hearts, had

long been living as Christians remote from all churches and unknown by

any. We can easily conceive that timidity in some cases, and distance

in others, swell the ranks of these secret disciples. Though they

follow not the footsteps of the flock, the Shepherd will lead them in

their solitude. There will be many more names in the Lamb's book of

life, depend upon it, than ever are written on the roll-calls of our

churches, or in missionary statistics. The shooting-stars that yearly

fill our sky are visible to us for a moment, when their orbit passes

into the lighted heavens, and then they disappear in the shadow of the

earth. But astronomers tell us that they are always there though to us

they seem to blaze but for a moment. We cannot see them, but they move

on their darkling path and have a sun round which they circle. So be

sure that in many heathen lands there are believing souls, seen by us

but for an instant and then lost, who yet fill their unseen place, and

move obedient round the Sun of Righteousness. Their names on earth are

dark, but when the manifestation of the sons of God shall come, they

shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for

ever and ever. Our work has results beyond our knowledge now. When the

Church, the Lamb's wife, shall lift up her eyes at the end of the days,

prophecy tells us that she shall wonder to see her thronging children,

whom she had never known till then, and will say, Who hath begotten me

these? Behold I was left alone. These, where had they been?' These were

God's hidden ones, nourished and brought up beyond the pale of the

outward Church, but brought at last to share her triumph, and to abide

at her side. Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold.'

What confidence then, what tender pity, what hope should fill our minds

when we look on the heathen world! We must never be contented with

present achievements. We are committed to a task which cannot end till

all the world hears the joyful sound and is blessed by walking in the

light of His countenance. When the great Roman Catholic missionary, the

Apostle of the East, was lying on his dying bed among the barbarous

people whom he loved, his passing spirit was busy about his work, and,

even in the article of death, while the glazing eye saw no more clearly

and the ashen lips had begun to stiffen into eternal silence, visions

of further conquests flashed before him, and his last word was

Amplius'--Onward! It ought to be the motto of the missionary work of

us, who boast a purer faith, to carry to the heathen and to fire our

own souls. If ever we are tempted to repose, to despondency, to rest

and be thankful when we number up our work and our converts, let us

listen to His voice as it speaks in that supreme hour when He beheld

the vision of the Cross, and beyond it that of a gathered world: Other

sheep I have, which are not of this fold.'

We have here--

II. Christ teaching us how to think of His work and ours.

Them also I must bring.' A necessity is laid upon Him, which springs at

once from that divine work which is the law of His life, and from His

own love and pity. The means for accomplishing this necessary work are

implied in the context, as in other parallel Scriptural sayings, to be

His propitiatory death. The instrumentality employed is not only His

own personal agency on earth, nor only His throned rule on the right

hand of God with power over the Spirit of holiness, but also the work

of His Church, and His work through them. Of that He is mainly speaking

when He says, Them also I must bring.' Here, then, are some truths

which ought to underlie and shape as well as animate our efforts for

heathenism.

And first, remember that the same sovereign necessity which was laid on

Him presses on us.

The Spirit of life' which was in Christ had its law,' which was the

will of God. That shaped all His being, and He set us the example of

perfectly clear recognition of, and perfect obedience to it, from the

first moment when He said, I must be about My Father's business,' to

the last, when He sighed forth, Father, into Thy hands I commit My

spirit.' Hence the frequent sayings setting forth His work as

determined by an imperative must,' which, whether it be alleged in

reference to some apparently small or to some manifestly great thing in

His life, is always equally imperative, and whether it seem to be based

on the need for the fulfilment of some prophetic word, or on the

proprieties and congruities of sonship, reposes at last on the will of

God. His final words on the Passover night, before he went out to

Gethsemane in the moonlight, contain the influence which moulded His

whole earthly life, As the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do.'

And this divine will constitutes for Him the deepest ground of the

necessity in the case before us. The eternal counsels of God had willed

that all the ends of the earth should see the salvation of the Lord';

therefore, whatever the toils and the pains, the loss and the death,

He, whose meat and drink was to do the will of Him that sent Him, must

give Himself to the task, nor rest till, one by one, the weary

wanderers are brought back on His shoulders and folded in His love.

In all which, let us remember, Jesus Christ is our pattern, not in His

work for the salvation of men, but in the spirit in which He did His

work. The solemn law of duty before which He bowed His head is a law

for us also. The authoritative imperative which He obeyed has power

over us. If we would have our lives holy and strong, wise and good, we

must have the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, making us free

from the law of sin and death,' for the obedience to the higher law

enfranchises from slavery to the lower, and all other authority ceases

over us when we are Christ's men. We are bound to service directed to

the same end as His--even the salvation of the world. The same voice

which says to Him, I will give Thee for a light to the Gentiles,' says

to us, Ye are My witnesses, and My servant whom I have chosen.' The

same Will which hath constituted Him the anointed Prophet, says of us,

Touch not Mine anointed and do My prophets no harm.' We are redeemed

that we may show forth God's praises. Not for ourselves alone, nor for

purposes terminating in our own personal acceptance with God, or the

perfecting of our own characters, priceless as these are, but for ends

which affect the world has God had mercy on us. We are bought with a

price that we may be the servants of God. We have received that we may

give forth,

God doth with us, as we with torches do,

Not light them for themselves.'

Arise, shine, for thy light is come.'

This missionary work of ours, then, is not one that can be taken up and

laid down at our own pleasure. It is no excrescence, or accidental

outgrowth of the Church's life. We are all too apt to think of it as an

extra, a kind of work of supererogation, which those may engage in who

have a liking that way, and which those who do not care about it may

leave alone, and no harm done. When shall we come to feel deeply,

constantly, practically, that it must be done, and that we are sinning

when we neglect it? Dear brethren, have we laid on our hearts and

consciences the solemn weight of that necessity which moulded His life?

Have we felt the awful power of God's plainly spoken will, driving us

to this task? Do we know anything of that spirit which hears

ever-pealing in our ears that awful commandment, Go, go to all the

world, preach, preach the Gospel to every creature?' God commands us to

take the trumpet, and if we would not soil our souls with gross and

palpable sin, we must set it to our lips and sound an alarm, that by

His grace shall wake the sleepers, and make the hoary walls of the

robber-city that has afflicted the earth for so many weary millenniums,

rock to their fall, that the redeemed of the Lord may pass over and set

the captives free.

If we felt this as we ought, surely our consecration would be more

complete, and our service more worthy. A clear conviction of God's will

pointing the path for us, is, in all things, a wondrous help to

vigorous action, to calmness of heart, and thus to success. In this

mighty work, it would brace us for larger efforts, and fit us for

larger results. It would simplify and deepen our motives, and thus

evolve from them nobler deeds and purer sacrifices. To all objections

from so-called prudence, to all calculations from sparse results, to

all cavils of onlookers who may carp and seek to hinder, we should have

one all-sufficient answer. It is not for us to bandy arguments on such

points as these. We care nothing for difficulties, for discouragements,

for cost. We may think about these till we lose all the manly chivalry

of Christian character, like the Apostle who gazed on the white crests

of the angry breakers flashing in the pale moonlight, till he forgot

who stood on the storm, and began to sink in his great fear. A nobler

spirit ought to be ours. The toil is sore, the sacrifices many, and the

yield seems small. Be it so! To all such thoughts we have one

answer--Oh! that we felt more its solemn power!--such is the will of

God. We are doing as we are bid, and we mean to go on. Them also must I

bring,' says the Master. Necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is me if I

preach not the Gospel,' echoes the Apostle. Let us, in the consecration

of resolved hearts, and in trembling obedience to the divine will, add

our choral Amen, and in the face of all the paralysing suggestions of

our own selfishness, and all the tempting voices of worldly wisdom and

unbelieving scornfulness that would stay our enterprise, let us fling

back the grand old answer, Whether it be right in the sight of God to

hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye, for we cannot but speak

the things which we have seen and heard.'

We must not forget, however, that it was no abhorrent toil to which

Christ reluctantly consented. But in this case, as always with Him, the

words of prophecy were true, I delight to do Thy will.' The schism

between law and choice had no existence for Him; and when He says that

He must bring the wandering sheep into the fold, He means not more

because of God's will than because of His own yearning desire to pour

out the treasures of His mercy.

So it ought to be with us. Our missionary work should not be degraded

beneath the level of duty indeed, but neither should it be left on that

level. We ought not only to be led to it by a power without, but

impelled by an energy within. If we would be like our Master, we must

know the necessity arising from our own heart's promptings, which leads

us to work for Him. He has very imperfectly caught the spirit of the

Gospel who has never felt the word as a fire in his bones, making him

weary of forbearing. If we only take to this work because we are bid,

and without sympathy for men, and longing desire to bring them all to

Him who has blessed us, we may almost as well leave it alone. We shall

do very little good to anybody, to ourselves little, to the world less.

That our own hearts may teach us this necessity, we must live near our

Master, and know His grace for ourselves. In proportion as we do, we

shall be eager to proclaim it, and not stand idling in a corner of the

market-place, till some unmistakable order sends us into the vineyard,

but go for the relief of our own feelings. This is a day of good

tidings, and we cannot hold our peace,' said the poor lepers in the

camp to one another. The same feeling that we must tell the good news

just because we know it, and it will make our brethren glad, is part of

the Christian character. A blessed necessity, then, is laid upon us. A

blessed work is given us, which brings with it at once the joy of

obedience to our Father's will, and the joy of gratifying a deep

instinct of our nature. Them also must I bring,' said the Saviour,

because He loved men. To me who am less than the least of all saints,

is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the

unsearchable riches,' echoes the Apostle. Let us live in the light of

our Lord's eye, and drink deep of His spirit, till the talk becomes a

grace and privilege, not a burden, and till silence and idleness in His

cause shall be felt to be impossible, because it would be violence to

our own feelings, and the loss of a great joy as well as sin against

our Father's will.

Consider again, by what means the sheep are to be brought to Christ?

The context distinctly answers the question. There His propitiatory

death is emphatically set forth as the power by which it is to be

accomplished. The verse before our text says, I lay down My life for

the sheep'; that after our text says, Therefore doth My Father love Me,

because I lay down My life.' It is the same connection of means and end

as appears in the wonderful words with which He received the Greeks who

came up to the feast, and heard the great truth, for want of which

their philosophy and art came to nothing. Except a corn of wheat fall

into the ground and die it abideth alone'--I, if I be lifted up from

the earth will draw all men unto Me.'

Yes, brethren! the Cross of Christ, and it alone, gathers men into a

unity; for it alone draws men to Christ. His death, as our

propitiation, effects such a change in the aspects of the divine

government, and in the incidence of the divine justice, that we who

were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.' His death, as the

constraining motive of life in the hearts which receive it, draws them

away from their own ways by the cords of love, and binds them to Him.

His death is His purchase of the gifts of that divine Spirit for the

rebellious, who now convinces the world and endows the Church, till we

all come unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.'

The First Begotten from the dead is therefore the prince of all the

kings of the earth, and He so rides among the nations as to bring the

world to Himself. The philosophy of history lies in the words, Other

sheep I have, them also I must bring.'

Christian missions abundantly prove that the Cross and the proclamation

of the Cross have this power, and that nothing else has. It is not the

ethics of Christianity, nor the abstract truths which may be deduced

from its story, but it is the story of the suffering Redeemer that

gives it its power over human hearts, in all conditions, and climates,

and stages of culture. The magnetism of the Cross alone is mighty

enough to overcome the gravitation of the soul to sin and the world. We

hear much nowadays about a new reformation which is to be effected on

Christianity, by purifying it of its historical facts and of its

repulsive sacrificial aspect. When this is done, and the pure spiritual

ideas are disengaged from their fleshly garb, then, we are told, will

be the apotheosis and glorification of Christ. This will be the real

lifting up from the earth; this will draw all men. Aye, and when this

is done what will be left? Christianity will be purified back again

into a vague Deism, which one would have thought had proved itself

toothless and impotent, centuries ago. Spiritualising will turn out to

be very like evaporating, the residuum will be a miserably

unsatisfactory something, near akin to nothing, and certainly incapable

either of firing its disciples with a desire to spread their faith, if

we may call it so by courtesy, or of drawing men to itself. A

Christianity without a Sacrifice on the altar will be a Christianity

without worshippers in the Temple. The King of Kings who rides forth

conquering is clothed in a vesture dipped in blood. The Christian

Emperor saw in the heavens the Cross, with the legend: In this sign

thou shalt conquer!' It is an emblem true for all time. The Cross is

the power unto salvation. The races scattered on the earth have often

sought to make for themselves a rallying-point, and their attempts at

union have become Babels, centres of repulsion and confusion. God has

given us the Centre, the Tree of life in the midst. The crucified

Saviour is the Root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign for the

people; to it shall the Gentiles seek, and resting beneath the shadow

of the Cross be at peace. I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will

draw all men unto Me.'

Once more our Lord teaches us here to identify the work of the Church

with His own. What His servants do for Him He does, for from Him they

derive the power to do it, and from Him comes the blessing which makes

it effectual. He works in us, He works with us, He works for us. He

works in us. We have the grace of His Spirit to touch our hearts and

sanctify us for service. He puts it into the wills and desires of His

Church to consecrate themselves to the task. He teaches them sympathy

and self-devotion. He breathes world-wide aspirations into them. He

raises up men to go forth. He works with us, helping our weakness,

enlightening our ignorance, directing our steps, giving power to the

student at his dry task of grammar and dictionary, being mouth and

wisdom to them that speak in His name, touching the hearts of them that

hear. In our basket He puts the seed-corn; the furrows of the field He

makes soft with showers, and when it is sown He blesses the springing

thereof. He works for us, opening doors among the nations, ordering the

courses of providence, and holding His hand around His servants, so

that they are immortal till their work is done; and can ever lift up

thankful voices to Him who leads them joyful captives at His own

triumphal car, as it rolls on its stately march, scattering the sweet

odours of His name wherever the long procession sweeps through the

world. We neither go a warfare at our own charges, nor in our own

might. He will fight with us, and He will pay us liberally at the last.

When we count up our own resources, do not we often leave Christ out of

the reckoning? Do we not measure our strength against the enemies', and

forget that one weak man, plus Christ, is always in the majority? It is

not ye that speak, but the Spirit of My Father which speaketh in you.'

I laboured, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.' So

helped, so inspired, we are wrong to despond; we are wrong not to

expect great things and attempt great things; we are wrong not to dare,

we are wrong to do the work of the Lord negligently. Let us feel that

Christ's work is ours, and we shall be bowed beneath the solemnity of

the thought, shall accept joyfully the necessity. Let us feel that our

work is Christ's, and we shall rejoice in infirmity that His power may

rest upon us, shall bid adieu to faint-hearted fears, and be sure that

then it must prosper. Arise, O Lord! plead Thine own cause.' Not unto

us, O Lord! not unto us, but to Thy name give glory.

The Lord ascended into Heaven and sat on the right hand of God, and

they went everywhere preaching the word.' It seems a strange contrast

between the rest of the Lord, sitting in sublime expectancy of

conscious power til His enemies become His footstool, and the toils of

His scattered disciples. It is like that moment which the genius of the

great painter has caught in an immortal work, when Jesus in rapt

communion with the mighty dead, and crowned with the accepting word

from Heaven, floated transfigured above the Holy Mount, while below His

disciples wrestled impotently with the demon that would not be cast

out. But it is not really contrast. He has not so parted the toils as

that His are over ere ours begin. He has not left His Church militant

to bear the brunt of the battle while the Captain of the Lord's host

only watches the current of the heady fight--like Moses from the safe

mountain. The Evangelist goes on to tell us that the Lord also was

working with them and sharing their toils, lightening their burdens,

preparing for them successes on earth, and a rest like His when He

shall gird Himself and serve them. Thus, the first time that the

heavens opened again to mortal eyes after they closed on His ascending

form, was to show Him to the martyr in the council chamber, not sitting

careless or restful, but standing at the right hand of God, to

intercede for, to strengthen, to receive and glorify His dying servant.

He goes with us where we go, and through our works and gifts and

prayers, through our proclamation of the Cross, He worketh His will,

and shall finally accomplish that great necessity laid upon Him by the

Father's counsels, and upon us by His commandment, and to be effected

by His death, that He should die, not for that nation only, but also

that He should gather together in one the children of God who are

scattered abroad.

We have here--

III. Our Lord teaching us how to think of the certain issues of His

work and ours.

They shall hear My voice, and there shall be one fold and one

Shepherd.' We may regard these words as embracing two things; a nearer

issue, namely, the response that will always attend His call; and a

more remote, namely, the completion of His work. There is, of course, a

very blessed sense in which the latter words are true now, and have

been ever since Paul could say to those who had been aliens from the

commonwealth of Israel, He hath made both one. Now, therefore, ye are

no more foreigners but fellow-citizens with the saints.' But the fold

which now exists, limited in numbers, with its members but partially

conscious of their unity, and surrounded by those who follow hireling

shepherds, does not exhaust these great words. They shall not be

accomplished till that far-off future have come.

But for the present we have the predictions of the former clause, They

shall hear My voice.' What manner of expectations does it teach us to

cherish? It seems to speak not of universal reception of Christ's

message, but of some as hearing and some as forbearing. It teaches us

to look for divers results attending our missionary work. There will

always be a Dionysius the Areopagite, the woman Lydia, the kindly

barbarians, the conscience-stricken jailer. There will always be the

scoffers, who mock when they hear of Jesus and the resurrection'; the

hesitating who compound with conscience by promising to hear again of

this matter, the fierce opponents who invoke constituted authorities or

mob violence to crush the message.

Again, the words seem to contemplate a long task. There is nothing

about the rate at which His Kingdom shall spread, not a syllable to

answer inquiries as to when the end shall come. The whole tone of the

language suggests the idea that bringing back the sheep is to take a

long time, and to cost many a tedious journey into the wilderness. Not

a sudden outburst, but a slow kindling of the flame, is what our Lord

teaches us here to expect.

But while thus calm in tone and moderate in expectation, the words

breathe a hope as confident as it is calm, as clear as it is moderate.

There will always be a response. His voice shall never be lifted up in

the snow-storm or lonely hillsides only to be blown back into His own

ears, unheard and unheeded. Be they few or many, they shall hear. Be

the toil longer or shorter, more or less severe, it shall not be in

vain.

And to these expectations we shall do wisely if we attune ours. Omit

from your hopes what your Lord has omitted from His promises; do not

ask what He has not told. Do not wonder if you encounter what He met,

for the disciple is not greater than his Master, and only if they have

kept My saying will they keep yours also. But, on the other hand,

expect as much as He has prophesied; accept it when it comes as the

fruit of His work, not of yours, and build a firm faith that your

labour shall not be in vain on these calm and prescient words.

So much for the course of the kingdom. And what of the end? One by one

the sheep have been brought, at last they are all gathered in, not a

hoof left behind. The stars steal singly into their places in the

heavens as the darkness deepens, and He bringeth them forth by number,'

until at the noon of night the sky is crowded with their lights, and

for that He is great in power, not one faileth.' What expectations are

we here taught to cherish then of the final issue?

Mark, to begin with, that there is implied the ultimate universality of

His dominion and sole supremacy of His throne. There is to be but one

Shepherd, and over all the earth a great unity of obedience to Him.

Here is the knell of all authority that does not own Him, and the

subordination of all that does. The hirelings, the blind guides, that

have misled and afflicted humanity for so many weary ages, shall be all

sunk in oblivion. The false gods shall be discrowned, and lie shattered

on their temple-sill, and there shall be no worshippers to care for or

to try to repair their discomfiture. Bow your heads before Him,

thinkers who have led men on devious paths and spoken but a partial

truth and a wisdom all confused with foolishness! Lower your swords

before Him, warriors who have builded your cities on blood and led men

like sheep to the slaughter! He is more glorious and excellent than the

mountains of prey. Cast your crowns before Him, princes and all judges

of the earth, for He is King by right of the crown of thorns! This is

the Lord of all--Teacher, Leader, Ruler of all men. All other names

shall be forgotten but His shall abide. If they have been shepherds who

would not come in by the door, a ransomed world shall rejoice over

their fall with the ancient hymn, Other gods beside Thee have had

dominion over us; they are dead, they shall not live, Thou hast

destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish.' If they have been

subject to the chief Shepherd and ensamples to the flock, they will

rejoice to decrease before His increase, and having helped to bring the

Bride to the Bridegroom, will gladly stand aside and be forgotten in

the perfect love that enters into full fruition at the last. Then when

none contest nor intercept the reverential obedience that the whole

world brings to Him, shall be fulfilled the firm promise which declared

long ago: I will set up one Shepherd over them, and He will feed them

and be their Shepherd.'

Mark again the blessed nature of the relation between Christ and all

men which is here foretold. From of old, the shepherd has been in all

nations the emblem of kingly power, of leadership of every sort. How

often the fact has contradicted the symbol let history tell. But with

Jesus the reality does not only contradict, but even transcends, the

tender old comparison. He rules with a gentle sway. His sceptre is no

rod of iron, but the shepherd's crook, and the inmost meaning of its

use is that it may comfort' us, as David learned to feel. There gather

round the metaphor all thoughts of merciful guidance, of tender care,

of a helping arm when we are weak, of a loving bosom where we are

carried when we are weary. It speaks of a seeking love that roams over

every high hill till it finds, and of a strong shoulder that bears us

back when He has found. It tells of sweet hours of rest in the hot

noontide by still waters, of ample provision for all the soul's

longings in green pastures. It speaks of footsteps that go before, in

which men may follow and find them ways of pleasantness. It speaks of

gentle callings by name which draw the heart. It speaks of defence when

lion and bear come ravening down, and of safe couching by night when

the silent stars behold the sleeping sheep and the wakeful shepherd. He

Himself gives its highest significance to the emblem, in the words of

this great discourse, when He fixes on His knowledge, His calling of

His sheep, His going before them, His giving His life for them. Such

are the gracious blessings which here He teaches us to think of as

possessed in the happy days that shall be, by all the world.

And, on the other hand, the symbol speaks of confiding love in the

hearts of men, of a great peacefulness of meek obedience stilling and

gladdening their wills, of the consciousness of His perfect love, and

the knowledge of all His gracious character, of sweet answering

communion with Him, of safety from all enemies, of freedom, of familiar

passage in and out to God. Thus knit together shall be the one fold and

the one Shepherd. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall

be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall

the heat nor sun smite them, for He that hath mercy on them shall feed

them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them.'

Mark again what a vision is here given of the relations of men with one

another.

They are to be all gathered into a peaceful unity. They are to be one

because they all hearken to one voice. It is to be observed that our

Lord does not say, as our English Bible makes Him say, that there is to

be one fold. He drops that word of set purpose in the latter clause of

our text, and substitutes for it another, which may perhaps be best

rendered flock. Why this change in the expression? Because, as it would

seem, he would have us learn that the unity of that blessed future time

is not to be like the unity of the Jewish Church, a formal and external

one. That ancient polity was a fold. It held its members together by

outward bonds of uniformity. But the universal Church of the future is

to be a flock. It is to be really and visibly one. But it is to be so,

not because it is hemmed in by one enclosure, but because it is to be

gathered round one Shepherd. The more closely they are drawn to Him,

the more near will they be to each other. The centre in which all the

radii meet keeps them all in their places. We being many are one bread,

for we are all partakers of that one bread.' In the ritual of the Old

Covenant, the great golden candlestick with its seven branches stood in

the court of the Temple, emblem of the formal oneness of the people,

which was meant to be the light of the Lord to a dark world. In the

vision of the New Covenant, the seer in Patmos beheld not the one lamp

with its branches, but the seven golden candlesticks, which were made

into a holier and a freer unity because the Son of Man walked in their

midst--emblem of the oneness in diversity of the peoples, who were

sometimes darkness, but shall one day be light in the Lord. There may

continue to be national distinctions. There may or there may not be any

external unity. But at all events our Lord turns away our thoughts from

the outward to the inward, and bids us be sure that though the folds be

many the flock shall be one, because they shall all hear and follow

Him.

The words, however, suggest for us the blessed thought of the peaceful

relations that shall then subsist among men. The tribes of the earth

shall couch beside each other like the quiet sheep in the fold, and

having learned of His great meekness, they shall no more bite nor

devour one another. Alas! alas! the words seem too good to be true.

They seem long, long of coming to pass. Ever since they were spoken the

old bloody work has been going on, and the old lusts of the human heart

have been busy sowing the dragon's teeth that shall spring up in wars

and fightings. In savage lands warfare rages on, ceaseless, ignoble,

unrecorded, and seemingly purposeless as that of animalcules in a drop

of water. On civilised soil, men, who love the same Christ and worship

Him in the same tongue, are fronting each other at this hour. The war

of actual swords, and the war of conflicting creeds, and the jostling

of human selfishness in the rough road of life, are all around us, and

their seeds are within ourselves. The race of men do not live like

folded sheep, rather like a flock of wolves, who first run over and

then devour their weaker fellows.

But here is a fairer hope, and it will be fulfilled when all evil

thoughts, and all selfish desires, and all jealous grudgings shall

vanish from men's hearts, as unclean spirits at cockcrow, and shall

leave them, self-forgetful, yielding of their own prerogatives,

desirous of no other man's, abhorrent of inflicting, and patient of

receiving wrong. There will be no fuel then to blow into sulphurous

flame, though all the blasts from hell were to fan the embers. But

peace and concord shall be in all men, for Christ shall be in all.

National distinctions may abide, but national enmities--the oldest and

deepest, shall disappear. There shall still be Assyria, and Egypt, and

Israel, but their former relation will be replaced by a bond of amity

in their common possession of Him who is our peace. In that day shall

Israel be the third with Egypt, and with Assyria, even a blessing in

the midst of the land, whom the Lord shall bless, saying, Blessed be

Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine

inheritance.' God be thanked! that though we see, and our fathers have

seen, so much that seems to contradict our hopes of a peaceful world,

and though to-day the hell-hounds of war are baying over the earth, and

though nowhere can we see signs even of the approach of the halcyon

time, yet we can wait for the vision, knowing that it will come at the

appointed time, when

No war or battle's sound

Is heard the world around,

The idle spear and shield are high uphung;

The trumpet speaks not to the armed throng,

And Kings sit still, with awful eye,

As if they surely knew their Sovereign Lord was by.'

Such are the thoughts which our Lord would teach us as to the present

and as to the future of our missionary work. For the one, moderate

expectations of success, not unchequered by disappointment, and a brave

patience in long toil. For the other, hopes which cannot be too

glowing, and a faith which cannot be too obstinate. The one is being

fulfilled in our own and our brethren's experience even now; we may be

therefore all the more sure that the other will be so in due time. If

we look with Christ's eyes, we shall not be depressed by the apparent

unbroken surface of heathenism but see, as He did, everywhere souls

that belong to Him, who may and must be won; we shall joyfully embrace

the work which He has given us to do; we shall arm ourselves against

the discouragements of the present, by living much in the past at the

foot of the Cross, till we catch the true image of the Saviour's love,

and much in the future in the midst of the ransomed flock, till we too

behold the roses blossoming in the wilderness, the bright waters

covering all the dry places in the desert, and the families of men

sitting, clothed and in their right mind, at the feet of Jesus.

Our missionary work is the pure and inevitable result of a belief in

these words of my text. Can a man believe that Christ has other sheep

for whom He died because He must bring them in, whom He will bring in

because He died, and not work according to his power in the line of the

divine purposes? The missionary spirit is but the Christian spirit

working in one particular direction. Missionary societies are but one

of the authentic outcomes of Christian principles, as natural as

holiness of life, or the act of prayer.

To secure, then, a more vigorous energy in such work, we need chiefly

what we need for all Christian growth--namely, more and deeper

communion with Christ, a more vivid realisation of His grace and love

for ourselves. And then we need that, under the double stimulus of His

love and of His commandment--which at bottom are one--our minds should

be more frequently occupied with this subject of Christian missions.

Most of us know too little about the matter to feel very much. And then

we need that we should more seriously reflect upon the facts in

relation to our own personal responsibility and duty. You complain of

the triteness of such appeals as this sermon. Brethren, have you ever

tried that recipe for freshening up well-worn truths, namely, thinking

about them in connection with the simplest, most important of all

questions--what, then, ought I to do in view of these truths? Am I

exaggerating when I say, that not one-half of the professing Christians

of our day give an hour in the year to pondering that question, with

reference to missionary work? Oh! dear friends, see to it that you live

in Christ for yourselves, and then see to it that you think His

thoughts about the heathen world, till your pity is stirred and your

mind braced to the firm resolve that you too will work the works of

Christ and bring in the wanderers.

We have had as large results as Christ has led us to expect, and far

larger than we deserved. Christian missions are yet in their

infancy--alas! that it should be so. But in these seventy years since

they may be said to have begun, what wonderful successes have been

achieved. We are often told that we have done nothing. Is it so? The

plant has been got together, methods of working have been systematised,

mistakes in some measure corrected. We have spent much of our time in

learning how to work, and that process is by no means over yet. But

with all these deductions, which ought fairly to be made, how much has

been accomplished? The Bible has been put into the languages of seven

hundred millions of men. The beginnings of a Christian literature have

been supplied for five-sixths of the world. Half a million of professed

converts have been gathered in, or as many as there were at the end of

the first century, after about the same number of years of labour, and

with apostles for missionaries and miracles for proof. And if these

still bear on their ankles the marks of the fetters, and limp as they

walk, or cannot see very clearly at first, it is no more than might be

expected from their long darkness in the prison-house, and it is no

more than Paul had to contend with at Ephesus and Corinth.

Every church that has engaged in the toil has shared in the blessing,

and has its own instances of special prosperity. We have had Jamaica;

the London Missionary Society, Madagascar, and the South Seas; the

Wesleyans, Fiji; the Episcopal Societies, Tinnevelly; the American

brethren, Burmah, and the Karens. Some of the ruder mythologies have

been so utterly extirpated that the children of idolaters have seen the

gods whom their fathers worshipped for the first time in the British

Museum. While over those more compact and scientific systems which lie

like an incubus on mighty peoples, there has crept a sickening

consciousness of a coming doom, and they already half own their

conqueror in the Stronger One than they.

They feel from Judah's land

The dreaded Infant's hand.'

Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, the idols are upon the beasts.' Surely

God has granted us success enough for our thankful confidence, more

than enough for our deserts. I repeat it, it is as much as He promised,

as much as we had any right to expect, and it is a vast deal more than

any other system of belief or of no belief, any of your spiritualised

Christianities, or still more intangible creeds has ever managed, or

ever thought of trying. To those who taunt us with no success, and who

perhaps would not dislike Christian missions so much if they disliked

Christian truth a little less, we may very fairly and calmly

answer--This rod has budded at all events; do you the same with your

enchantments.

But the past is no measure of the future. From the very nature of the

undertaking the ratio of progress increases at a rapid rate. The first

ten years of labour in India showed twenty-seven converts, the seventh

ten showed more than twenty-seven thousand. The preparation may be as

slow as the solemn gathering of the thunder-clouds, as they noiselessly

steal into their places, and slowly upheave their grey billowing

crests; the final success may be as swift as the lightning which

flashes in an instant from one side of the heavens to the other. It

takes long years to hew the tunnel, to make the crooked straight, and

the rough places plain,' and then smooth and fleet the great power

rushes along the rails. To us the cry comes, Prepare ye in the desert

an highway for our God.' The toil is sore and long, but the glory of

the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.' The

Alpine summits lie white and ghastly in the spring sunshine, and it

seems to pour ineffectual beams on their piled cold; but by slow

degrees it is silently loosening the bands of the snow, and after a

while a goat's step, as it passes along a rocky ledge, or a breath of

wind will move a tiny particle, and in an instant its motion spreads

over a mile of mountain side, and the avalanche is rushing swifter and

mightier at every foot down to the valley below, where it will all turn

into sweet water, and ripple glancing in the sunshine. Such is our

work. It may seem very hopeless, and be mostly unobservable in surface

results, but it is very real for all that. The conquering impulse, for

which our task may have been to prepare the way, will be given, and

then we shall wonder to see how surely the kingdom was coming, even

when we observed it not.

Ye have need of patience, and to feed your patience, ye have need of

fellowship with Christ, of faith in His promises, of sympathy with His

mind. God has given us, dear brethren, special reason for renewed

consecration to this service in the blessings which have during the

year terminated our anxieties and crowned our work for our own Society.

But let us not dwell upon what has been done. These successes are

brooks by the way at which we may drink--nothing more. We ought to be

like shepherds in the lonely mountain glens, who see in the

fast-falling snow and the bitter blast a summons to the hillside, and

there all the night long wherever the drift lies deepest and the wind

bites the most sharply, search the most eagerly for the poor half-dead

creatures, and as they find each, bear it back to the safe shelter, nor

stay behind to count the rescued, nor to rest their weariness, for all

the bright light in the cottage and the blackness without, but forth

again on the same quest, till all the Master's sheep have been rescued

from the white death that lay treacherous around, and are sleeping at

peace in His folds. A mighty Voice ought ever to be sounding in our

ears, Other sheep I have,' and the answer of our hearts and of our

lives should be, Them also, O Lord! will I try to bring.' Not till the

far-off issue is accomplished shall we have a right to rest, and then

we, with all those He has helped us to gather to His side, shall be

among that flock, whom He who is at once Lamb and Shepherd, our Brother

and our Lord, our Sacrifice and King, shall feed and lead by living

fountains of waters,' in the sweet pastures of the upper world, where

there are no ravening wolves, nor false guides to terrify and bewilder

His flock any more at all for ever.

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[1] Preached before the Baptist Missionary Society.

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THE DELAYS OF LOVE

Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When He had heard

therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place

where He was.'--JOHN xi. 5, 6.

We learn from a later verse of this chapter that Lazarus had been dead

four days when Christ reached Bethany. The distance from that village

to the probable place of Christ's abode, when He received the message,

was about a day's journey. If, therefore, to the two days on which He

abode still after the receipt of the news, we add the day which the

messengers took to reach Him and the day which He occupied in

travelling, we get the four days since which Lazarus had been laid in

his grave. Consequently the probability is that, when our Lord had the

message, the man was dead. Christ did not remain still, therefore, in

order to work a greater miracle by raising Lazarus from the dead than

He would have done by healing, but He stayed--strange as it would

appear--for reasons closely connected with the highest well-being of

all the beloved three, and because He loved them.

John is always very particular in his use of that word therefore,' and

he points out many a subtle and beautiful connection of cause and

effect by his employment of it. I do not know that any of them are more

significant and more full of illumination with regard to the ways of

divine providence than the instance before us. How these two sisters

must have looked down the rocky road that led up from Jericho during

those four weary days, to see if there were any signs of His coming.

How strange it must have appeared to the disciples themselves that He

made no sign of movement, notwithstanding the message. Perhaps John's

scrupulous carefulness in pointing out that His love was Christ's

reason for His quiescence may reflect a remembrance of the doubts that

had crept over the minds of himself and his brethren during these two

days of strange inaction. The Evangelist will have us learn a lesson,

which reaches far beyond the instance in hand, and casts light on many

dark places.

I. Christ's delays are the delays of love.

We have all of us, I suppose, had experience of desires for the removal

of bitterness or sorrows, or for the fulfilment of expectations and

wishes, which we believed, on the best evidence that we could find, to

be in accordance with His will, and which we have been able to make

prayers out of, in true faith and submission, which prayers have had to

be offered over and over and over again, and no answer has come, It is

part of the method of Providence that the lifting away of the burden

and the coming of the desires should be a hope deferred. And instead of

stumbling at the mystery, or feeling as if it made a great demand upon

our faith, would it not be wiser for us to lay hold of that little word

of the Apostle's here, and to see in it a small window that opens out

on to a boundless prospect, and a glimpse into the very heart of the

divine motives in His dealings with us?

If we could once get that conviction into our hearts, how quietly we

should go about our work! What a beautiful and brave patience there

would be in us, if we habitually felt that the only reason which

actuates God's providence in its choice of times of fulfilling our

desires and lifting away our bitterness is our own good! Nothing but

the purest and simplest love, transparent and without a fold in it,

sways Him in all that He does. Why should it be so difficult for us to

believe this? If we were more in the way of looking at life, with all

its often unwelcome duty, and its arrows of pain and sorrow, and all

the disappointments and other ills that it is heir to, as a discipline,

and were to think less about the unpleasantness, and more about the

purpose, of what befalls us, we should find far less difficulty in

understanding that His delay is born of love, and is a token of His

tender care.

Sorrow is prolonged for the same reason as it was sent. It is of little

use to send it for a little while. In the majority of cases, time is an

element in its working its right effect upon us. If the weight is

lifted, the elastic substance beneath springs up again. As soon as the

wind passes over the cornfield, the bowing ears raise themselves. You

have to steep foul things in water for a good while before the pure

liquid washes out the stains. And so time is an element in all the good

that we get out of the discipline of life. Therefore, the same love

which sends must necessarily protract, beyond our desires, the

discipline under which we are put. If we thought of it, as I have said,

more frequently as discipline and schooling, and less frequently as

pain and a burden, we should understand the meaning of things a great

deal better than we do, and should be able to face them with braver

hearts, and with a patient, almost joyous, endurance.

If we think of some of the purposes of our sorrows and burdens, we

shall discern still more clearly that time is needed for accomplishing

them, and that, therefore, love must delay its coming to take them

away. For example, the object of them all, and the highest blessing

that any of us can obtain, is that our wills should be bent until they

coincide with God's, and that takes time. The shipwright, when he gets

a bit of timber that he wants to make a knee' out of, knows that to

mould it into the right form is not the work of a day. A will may be

broken at a blow, but it will take a while to bend it. And just because

swiftly passing disasters have little permanent effect in moulding our

wills, it is a blessing, and not an evil, to have some standing fact in

our lives, which will make a continual demand upon us for continually

repeated acts of bowing ourselves beneath His sweet, though it may seem

severe, will. God's love in Jesus Christ can give us nothing better

than the opportunity of bowing our wills to His, and saying, Not mine,

but Thine be done.' If that is why He stops on the other side of

Jordan, and does not come even to the loving messages of beloved

hearts, then He shows His love in the sweetest and the loftiest form.

So, dear friends, if you carry a lifelong sorrow, do not think that it

is a mystery why it should lie upon your shoulders when there are

omnipotence and an infinite heart in the heavens. If it has the effect

of bending you to His purpose, it is the truest token of His loving

care that He can send. In like manner, is it not worth carrying a

weight of unfulfilled wishes, and a weariness of unalleviated sorrows,

if these do teach us three things, which are one thing--faith,

endurance, prayerfulness, and so knit us by a threefold cord that

cannot be broken, to the very heart of God Himself?

II. This delayed help always comes at the right time.

Do not let us forget that Heaven's clock is different from ours. In our

day there are twelve hours, and in God's a thousand years. What seems

long to us is to Him a little while.' Let us not imitate the

shortsighted impatience of His disciples, who said, What is this that

He saith, A little while? We cannot tell what He saith.' The time of

separation looked so long in anticipation to them, and to Him it had

dwindled to a moment. For two days, eight-and-forty hours, He delayed

His answer to Mary and Martha, and they thought it an eternity, while

the heavy hours crept by, and they only said, It's very weary, He

cometh not, they said.' How long did it look to them when they had got

Lazarus back?

The longest protraction of the fulfilment of the most yearning

expectation and fulfilled desire will seem but as the winking of an

eyelid when we get to estimate duration by the same scale by which He

estimates it, the scale of Eternity. The ephemeral insect, born in the

morning and dead when the day fades, has a still minuter scale than

ours, but we should not think of regulating our estimate of long and

short by it. Do not let us commit the equal absurdity of regulating the

march of His providence by the swift beating of our timepieces. God

works leisurely because God has eternity to work in.

The answer always comes at the right time, and is punctual though

delayed. For instance, Peter is in prison. The Church keeps praying for

him; prays on, day after day. No answer. The week of the feast comes.

Prayer is made intensely and fervently and continuously. No answer. The

slow hours pass away. The last day of his life, as it would appear,

comes and goes. No answer. The night gathers; prayer rises to heaven.

The last hour of the last watch of the last night that he had to live

has come, and as the veil of darkness is thinning, and the day is

beginning to break, the angel of the Lord shone round about him.' But

there is no haste in his deliverance. All is done leisurely, as in the

confidence of ample time to spare, and perfect security. He is bidden

to arise quickly, but there is no hurry in the stages of his

liberation. Gird thyself and bind on thy sandals.' He is to take time

to lace them. There is no fear of the quaternion of soldiers waking, or

of there not being time to do all. We can fancy the half-sleeping and

wholly-bewildered Apostle fumbling at the sandal-strings, in dread of

some movement rousing his guards, and the calm angel face looking on.

The sandals fastened, he is bidden to put on his garments and follow.

With equal leisure and orderliness he is conducted through the first

and the second guard of sleeping soldiers, and then through the prison

gate. He might have been lifted at once clean out of his dungeon, and

set down in the house many were gathered praying for him. But more

signal was the demonstration of power which a deliverance so gradual

gave, when it led him slowly past all obstacles and paralysed their

power. God is never in haste. He never comes too soon nor too late. The

Lord shall help them, and that right early.' Sennacherib's army is

round the city, famine is within the walls. To-morrow will be too late.

But to-night the angel strikes, and the enemies are all dead men. So

God's delay makes the deliverance the more signal and joyous when it is

granted. And though hope deferred may sometimes make the heart sick,

the desire, when it comes, is a tree of life.

III. The best help is not delayed.

The principle which we have been illustrating applies only to one

half--and that the less important half--of our prayers and of Christ's

answers. For in regard to spiritual blessings, and our petitions for

fuller, purer, and diviner life, there is no delay. In that region the

law is not He abode still two days in the same place,' but Before they

call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear.' If

you have been praying for deeper knowledge of God, for lives liker His,

for hearts more filled with the Spirit, and have not had the answer, do

not fall back upon the misapplication of such a principle as this of my

text, which has nothing to do with that region; but remember that the

only reason why good people do not immediately get the blessings of the

Christian life for which they ask lies in themselves, and not at all in

God. Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask and have not,

because'--not because He delays, but because--ye ask amiss,' or

because, having asked, you get up from your knees and go away, not

looking to see whether the blessing is coming down or not.

Ah! there is a sad amount of lying and hypocrisy in prayers for

spiritual blessings. Many petitioners do not want to have them. They

would not know what to do with them if they got them. They make the

requests because their fathers did so before them, and because these

are the right kind of things to say in a prayer. Such prayers get no

answers. If a man prays for some spiritual enlargement, and then goes

out into the world and lives clean contrary to his prayers, what right

has he to say that God delays His answers? No, He does not delay His

answers, but we push back His answers, and the gift that is given we

will not take. Let us remember that the two halves of the divine

dealings are not regulated by the same principle, though they be

regulated by the same motive; and that the love which often delays for

our good, in regard to the desires that have reference to outward

things, is swift as the lightning to answer every petition which moves

within the circle of our spiritual life.

Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye stand praying, believe that' then

and there ye receive them'; and the undelaying God will take care that

you shall have them.'

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CHRIST'S QUESTION TO EACH

For the Young

. . . Believest then this? She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord.'--JOHN xi.

26, 27.

As each of these annual sermons which I have preached for so long comes

round, I feel more solemnly the growing probability that it may be the

last. Like a man nearing the end of his day's work, I want to make the

most of the remaining moments. Whether this is the last sermon of the

sort that I shall preach or not, it is certainly the last of the kind

that some of you will hear from me, or possibly from any one.

So, dear friends, I have felt that neither you nor I can afford to

waste this hour in considering subjects of secondary interest,

appropriate as some of them might be. I wish to come to the main point

at once, and to press upon you all, and especially on the younger

portion of this audience, the question of your own personal religion.

The words of my text, as you will probably remember, were addressed by

our Lord to Martha, as she was writhing in agony over her dead brother.

Christ proclaims, with singular calmness and majesty, His character and

work as the Resurrection and the Life, and then seeks to draw her from

her absorbing sorrow to an effort of faith which shall grasp the truths

He proclaims. He flashes out this sudden question, like the swift

thrust of a gleaming dagger. It is a demand for credence to His

assertion--on His bare word--tremendous as that assertion is. And nobly

was the demand met by the as swift, unfaltering answer, Yea, Lord,' I

believe in Thee, and so I believe in Thy word.

Now, friends, Jesus Christ is putting the same question to each of us.

And I pray that our answers may be Martha's.

I. Note, first, the significance of the question.

This.' What is this? The answer will tell us what are the central

essential facts, faith in which makes a Christian. Of course the form

in which our Lord's previous utterance was cast was coloured by the

circumstances under which He spoke, and was so shaped as to meet the

momentary exigency. But whilst thus the form is determined by the fact

that He was speaking to a heart wrung by separation, and as a

preliminary to a mighty act of resurrection, the essential truths which

are so expressed are those which, as I believe, constitute the

fundamental truths of Christianity--the very core and heart of the

Gospel.

Turn, then, but for a moment, to what immediately precedes my text. Our

Lord says three things. First, He asserts His supernatural character

and divine relation to life: I am the Resurrection and the Life.' Next,

He declares that it is possible for Him to communicate to dying and to

dead men a life which triumphs over death, and laughs at change, and

persists through the superficial experience which we christen by the

name of Death, unaffected, undiminished, as some sweet spring might

gush up in the heart of a salt, solitary sea. And then He declares that

the condition on which He, the Life-giver, gives of His immortal life

to dying men, is their trust in Him. These three--His character and

work, the gifts of which His hands are full, and the way by which the

gifts may be appropriated by us men--these three are, as I take it, the

central facts of Christianity. Believest thou this?'

The question comes to us all; and in these days of unsettlement it is

well to have some clear understanding of what is the irreducible

minimum' of Christian teaching. I take it that it lies here. There are

two opposite errors which, like all opposite errors, are bolted

together, and revolve round a common centre. The one of them is the

extreme conservative tendency which regards every pin and bolt of the

tabernacle as if it were equally sacred with the altar and the ark. And

the other is the tendency which christens itself liberal and

progressive,' and which is always ready to exchange old lamps, though

they have burnt brightly in the past, for new ones that are as yet only

glittering metal and untried. In these days, when it is a presumption

against any opinion, that our fathers believed it (an error into which

young people are most prone to fall), and when, by the energy of

contradiction, that error has evoked, and is evoking, the opposite

exaggeration that adheres to all that is traditional, to all that has

been regarded as belonging to the essentials of the Christian faith,

and so is fearful, trembling for the Ark of God when there is no need,

let us fall back upon these great words of the Master, and see that the

things which constitute the living heart of His message and gift to the

world are neither more nor less than these three: the supernatural

Christ, the life which He imparts, and the condition on which He

bestows it. Believest thou this?' If you do, you need take very little

heed of the fluctuations of contemporary opinion as to other matters,

valuable and important as these may be in their place; and may let men

say what they will about disputed questions--about the method by which

the vehicle of revelation has been created and preserved, about the

regulation of the external forms of the Church, about a hundred other

things that men often lose their tempers and spoil their Christianity

by fighting for, and fall back upon the great central verity, a Christ

from above, the Giver of Life to all that put their trust in Him.

Let me expand this question for you. We all have sinned and come short

of the glory of God'--believest thou this?' We must all appear before

the judgment-seat of Christ'--believest thou this?' God so loved the

world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on

Him should not perish'--believest thou this?' The Son of Man came . . .

to give His life a ransom for many'--believest thou this?' Being

justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus

Christ'--believest thou this?' Now is Christ risen from the dead, and

become the first fruits of them that slept'--believest thou this?' I go

to prepare a place for you'--believest thou this?' Where I am there

shall also My servant be'--believest thou this?' So shall we ever be

with the Lord'--believest thou this?' That is Christianity; and not

theories about inspiration, and priesthood, and sacramental efficacy,

or any of the other thorny questions which have, in the course of ages,

started up. Here is the living centre; hold fast, I beseech you, by it.

Then, again, the significance of this question is in the direction of

making clear for us the way by which men lay hold of these great

truths. The truths are of such a sort as that merely to say, Oh yes, I

believe it; it is quite true!' is by no means sufficient. If a man

tells me that two parallel lines produced ever so far will never meet,

I say, Yes, I believe it'; and there is nothing more to be done or

said. If a man says to me, Two and two make four,' I say, Yes'; and

there my assent ends. If a man says, It is right to do right,' it is

quite clear that the attitude of intellectual assent, which was quite

enough for the other order of statements, is not enough for this one;

and to merely say, Oh yes, it is right to do right,' is by no means the

only attitude which we ought to take in regard to such a truth. And if

God comes to me and says, Thou art a sinful man, and Jesus Christ has

died for thee; and if thou takest Him for thy Saviour thou shalt be

saved in this life, and saved for ever,' it is just as clear that no

mere acceptance of the saying as a verity exhausts my proper attitude

in reference to it. Or to come to plainer words, no man will really,

and out and out, and adequately, believe this gospel unless he does a

great deal more than assent to it or refrain from contradicting it.

So I desire to urge this form of the question on you now. Dear

brethren, do you trust in this,' which you say you believe? There is no

greater enemy of the Christian faith than the ordinary lazy--what the

philosophers call otiose, which is only a grand word for lazy--assent

of the understanding, because men will not take the trouble to

contradict it or think about it.

That is the sort of Christianity which is the Christianity of a good

many church and chapel-goers. They do not care enough about the subject

to contradict the ordinary run of belief. Of all impotent things there

is nothing more impotent than a creed which lies idly in a man's head,

and never has touched his heart or his will. Why, I should get on a

great deal better if I were talking to people that had never heard

anything about the gospel than I have any chance of getting on with

you, who have been drenched with it all your days, till it goes over

you and runs off like water off a duck's back. The shells that were

hurled against the earthworks of Sebastopol broke away the front

surface of the mounds, and then the rubbish protected the

fortifications; and that is what happens with many of my hearers. You

have heard the gospel so often that the debris of your old hearings is

raised between you and me, and my words cannot get at you. Believest

thou this?'--not in the fashion in which people stand up in church or

chapel and look about them and rattle off the Creed every Sunday of

their lives, and attach not the ghost of an idea to a single clause of

it; but in the sense that the conviction of these truths is so deep in

your hearts that it moves your whole nature to cast yourselves on Jesus

Christ as your Saviour and your all. That is the belief to which alone

the life that is promised here will come. Oh! brethren, I have no

business to ask you the question, and you have no need to answer it to

me! Sometimes good, well-meaning people do a mint of harm by pushing

such questions into the faces of people unprepared. But take the

question into your own hearts, and remember what belief is, and what it

is that you have to believe, and answer according to its true

significance, and in the light of conscience, the solemn question that

I press upon you.

II. Now, secondly, let me ask you to think of what depends upon the

answer.

In the case before us--if I may look back to it for an instant--there

is a very illuminative instance of what did depend upon it. Martha had

to believe that Christ was the Resurrection and the Life as a condition

precedent to her seeing that He was so. For, as He said Himself before

He spoke the mighty word which raised Lazarus, Said I not unto thee

that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?'

and so her faith was the condition of her being able to verify the

facts which her faith grasped. Well, let me put that into plainer

words. It is just this--a man gets from Christ what he trusts Christ to

give him, and there is no other way of proving the truth of His

promises than by accepting His promises, and then they fulfil

themselves. You cannot know that a medicine will cure you till you

swallow it. You must first taste' before you see that God is good.'

Faith verifies itself by the experience it brings.

And what does it bring? I said, all for which a man trusts Christ. All

is summed up in that one favourite word of our Lord as revealed in this

fourth Gospel, which includes in itself everything of blessedness and

of righteousness--life, life eternal. Dear brethren, you and I, apart

from Jesus Christ, are dead in trespasses and sins. The life that we

live in the flesh is an apparent life, which covers over the true death

of separation from God. And you young people, fix this in your minds at

the beginning, it will save you many a heartache, and many an

error--there is nothing worth calling life, except that which comes to

a quiet heart submissive and enfranchised through faith in Jesus

Christ. And if you will trust yourselves to Him, and answer this

question with your ringing Yea, Lord!' then you will get a life which

will quicken you out of your deadness; a life which will mould you day

by day into more entire beauty of character and conformity with

Himself; a life which will shed sweetness and charm over dusty

commonplaces, and make sudden verdure spring in dreary, herbless

deserts; a life which will bring a solemn joy into sorrow, a strength

for every duty; which will bring manna in the wilderness, honey from

the rock, light in darkness, and a present God for your sufficient

portion; a life which will run on into the dim glories of eternity, and

know no change but advancement, through the millenniums of ages.

But, dear brethren, whilst thus, on condition of their faith, the door

into all divine and endless blessedness and progress is flung wide open

for men, do not forget the other side of the issues which depend on

this question. For if it is true that Jesus Christ is Life, and the

Source of it, and that faith in Him is the way by which you and I get

it, then there is no escape from the solemn conclusion that to be out

of Christ, and not to be exercising faith in Him, is to be infected

with death, and to be shut up in a charnel-house. I dare not suppress

the plain teaching of Jesus Christ Himself: He that hath the Son hath

life; he that hath not the Son hath not life.' The issues that depend

upon the answer to this question of my text may be summed up, if I may

venture to say so, by taking the words of our Lord Himself and

converting them into their opposite. He said, He that believeth . . .

though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and

believeth on Me shall never die.' That implies, He that believeth not

in Christ, though he were living, yet shall he die, and whosoever

liveth and believeth not shall never live. These are the issues--the

alternative issues--that depend on your answer to this question.

III. And now, lastly, let me ask you to think of the direct personal

appeal to every soul that lies in this question.

I have dwelt upon two out of the three words of which the question is

composed--believest thou this?' Let me dwell for a moment on the third

of them--believest thou?'

Now that suggests the thought on which I do not need to dwell, but

which I seek briefly to lay upon your hearts and consciences--viz., the

intensely personal act of your own faith, by which alone Jesus Christ

can be of any use to you. Do not be led away by any vague notions which

people have about the benefits of a Church or its ordinances. Do not

suppose that any sacraments or any priest can do for you what you have

to do in the awful solitude of your own determining will--put out your

hand and grasp Jesus Christ. Can any person or thing be the condition

or channel of spiritual blessing to you, except in so far as your own

individual act of trust comes into play? You must take the bread with

your own hands, you must masticate it with your own teeth, you must

digest it with your own organs, before it can minister nourishment to

your blood and force to your life. And there is only one way by which

any man can come into any vital and life-giving connection with Jesus

Christ, and that is, by the exercise of his own personal faith.

And remember, too, that as the exercise of uniting trust in Jesus

Christ is exclusively your own affair, so exclusively your own affair

is the responsibility of answering this question. To you alone is it

addressed. You, and only you, have to answer it.

There was once a poor woman who went after Jesus Christ, and put out a

pale, wasted, tremulous finger to touch the hem of His garment. His

fine sensitiveness detected the light pressure of that petitioning

finger, and allowed virtue to go out, though the crowd surged about Him

and thronged Him. No crowds come between you and Jesus Christ. You and

He, the two of you, have, so to speak, the world to yourselves, and

straight to you comes this question, Believest thou?'

Ah! brethren, that habit of skulking into the middle of the multitude,

and letting the most earnest appeal from the pulpit go diffused over

the audience is the reason why you sit there quiet, complacent, perhaps

wholly unaffected by what I am trying to make a pointed, individual

address. Suppose all the other people in this place of worship were

away but you and I, would not the word that I am trying to speak come

with more force to your hearts than it does now? Well, think away the

world and all its millions, and realise the fact that you stand in

Christ's presence, with all His regard concentrated upon you, and that

to thee individually this question comes from a gracious, loving heart,

which longs that you answer, Yea, Lord, I believe!'

Why should you not? Suppose you said to Him, No, Lord, I do not'; and

suppose He said, Why do you not?' what do you think you would say then?

You will have to answer it one day, in very solemn circumstances, when

all the crowds will fall away, as they do from a soldier called out of

the ranks to go up and answer for mutiny to his commanding officer.

Every one of us shall give an account of himself,' and the lips that

said so lovingly at the grave of Lazarus, Believest thou this?' and are

saying it again, dear friend, to you, even through my poor words, will

ask it once more. For this is the question the answer to which settles

whether we shall stand at His right hand or at His left. Say now, with

humble faith, Yea, Lord!' and you will have the blessing of them who

have not seen, and yet have believed.

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THE OPEN GRAVE AT BETHANY

Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where

Martha met Him. The Jews then which were with her in the house, and

comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went

out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. Then

when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His

feet, saying unto Him, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had

not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also

weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was

troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They say unto Him, Lord,

come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how He loved him!

And some of them said. Could not this Man, which opened the eyes of the

blind, have caused that even this man should not have died! Jesus

therefore again groaning in Himself, cometh to the grave. It was a

cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone.

Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this

time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto

her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou

shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the

place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said,

Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I know that Thou

hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it,

that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And when He thus had

spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that

was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his

face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him,

and let him go. Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen

the things which Jesus did, believed on Him.'--JOHN xi. 30-45.

Why did Jesus stay outside Bethany and summon Martha and Mary to come

to Him? Apparently that He might keep Himself apart from the noisy

crowd of conventional mourners whose presence affronted the majesty and

sanctity of sorrow, and that He might speak to the hearts of the two

real mourners. A divine decorum forbade Him to go to the house. The

Life-bringer keeps apart. His comforts are spoken in solitude. He

reverenced grief. How beautifully His sympathetic delicacy contrasts

with the heartless rush of those who were comforting' Mary when they

thought that she was driven to go suddenly to the grave by a fresh

burst of sorrow! If they had had any real sympathy or perception, they

would have stayed where they were, and let the poor burdened heart find

ease in lonely weeping. But, like all vulgar souls, they had one

idea--never to leave mourners alone or let them weep.

Three stages seem discernible in the self-revelation of Jesus in this

crowning miracle: His agitation and tears, His majestic confidence in

His life-giving power now to be manifested, and His actual exercise of

that power.

I. The repetition by Mary of Martha's words, as her first salutation,

tells a pathetic story of the one thought that had filled both sisters'

hearts in these four dreary days. Why had He not come? How easily He

could have come! How surely He could have prevented all this misery!

Confidence in His power blends strangely with doubt as to His care. A

hint of reproach is in the words, but more than a hint of faith in His

might. He does not rebuke the rash judgment implied, for He knew the

true love underlying it; but He does not directly answer Mary, as He

had done Martha, for the two sisters needed different treatment.

We note that Mary has no such hope as Martha had expressed. Her more

passive, meditative disposition had bowed itself, and let the grief

overwhelm her. So in her we see a specimen of the excess of sorrow

which indulges in the monotonous repetition of what would have happened

if something else that did not happen had happened, and which is too

deeply dark to let a gleam of hope shine in. Words will do little to

comfort such grief. Silent sharing of its weeping and helpful deeds

will do most.

So a great wave of emotion swept across the usually calm soul of Jesus,

which John bids us trace to its cause by therefore' (ver. 33). The

sight of Mary's real, and the mourners' half-real, tears, and the sound

of their loud keening,' shook His spirit, and He yielded to, and even

encouraged, the rush of feeling (troubled Himself') . But not only

sympathy and sorrow ruffled the clear mirror of His spirit; another

disturbing element was present. He was moved with indignation' (Rev.

Ver. marg.). Anger at Providence often mingles with our grief, but that

was not Christ's indignation. The only worthy explanation of that

strange ingredient in Christ's agitation is that it was directed

against the source of death,--namely, sin. He saw the cause manifested

in the effects. He wept for the one, He was wroth at the other. The

tears witnessed to the perfect love of the man, and of the God revealed

in the man; the indignation witnessed to the recoil and aversion from

sin of the perfectly righteous Man, and of the holy God manifested in

Him. We get one glimpse into His heart, as on to some ocean heaving and

mist-covered. The momentary sight proclaims the union in Him, as the

Incarnate Word, of pity for our woes and of aversion from our sins.

His question as to the place of the tomb is not what we should have

expected; but its very abruptness indicates effort to suppress emotion,

and resolve to lose no time in redressing the grief. Most sweetly human

are the tears that start afresh after the moment's repression, as the

little company begin to move towards the grave. And most sadly human

are the unsympathetic criticisms of His sacred sorrow. Even the best

affected of the bystanders are cool enough to note them as tokens of

His love, at which perhaps there is a trace of wonder; while others

snarl out a sarcasm which is double-barrelled, as casting doubt on the

reality either of the love or of the power. It is easy to weep, but if

He had cared for him, and could work miracles, He might surely have

kept him alive.' How blind men are! Jesus wept,' and all that the

lookers-on felt was astonishment that He should have cared so much for

a dead man of no importance, or carping doubt as to the genuineness of

His grief and the reality of His power. He shows us His pity and sorrow

still--to no more effect with many.

II. The passage to the tomb was marked by his continued agitation. But

his arrival there brought calm and majesty. Now the time has come which

He had in view when He left his refuge beyond Jordan; and, as is often

the case with ourselves, suddenly tremor and tumult leave the spirit

when face to face with a moment of crisis. There is nothing more

remarkable in this narrative than the contrast between Jesus weeping

and indignant, and Jesus serene and authoritative as He stands fronting

the cave-sepulchre. The sudden transformation must have awed the

gazers.

He points to the stone, which, probably like that of many a grave

discovered in Palestine, rolled in a groove cut in the rocky floor in

front of the tomb. The command accords with His continual habit of

confining the miraculous within the narrowest limits. He will do

nothing by miracle which can be done without it. Lazarus could have

heard and emerged, though the stone had remained. If the story had been

a myth, he very likely would have done so. Like loose him, and let him

go,' this is a little touch that cannot have been invented, and helps

to confirm the simple, historical character of the account.

Not less natural, though certainly as unlikely to have been told unless

it had happened, is Martha's interruption. She must have heard what was

going on, and, with her usual activity, have joined the procession,

though we left her in the house. She thinks that Jesus is going into

the grave; and a certain reverence for the poor remains, as well as for

Him, makes her shrink from the thought of even His loving eyes seeing

them now. Clearly she has forgotten the dim hopes which had begun in

her when she talked with Jesus. Therefore He gently reminds her of

these; for His words (ver. 40) can scarcely refer to anything but that

interview, though the precise form of expression now used is not found

in the report of it (vers. 25-27).

We mark Christ's calm confidence in His own power. His identification

of its effect with the outflashing of the glory of God, and His

encouragement to her to exercise faith by suspending her sight of that

glory upon her faith. Does that mean that He would not raise her

brother unless she believed? No; for He had determined to awake him out

of sleep' before He left Peraea. But Martha's faith was the condition

of her seeing the glory of God in the miracle. We may see a thousand

emanations of that glory, and see none of it. We shall see it if we

exercise faith. In the natural world, seeing is believing'; in the

spiritual, believing is seeing.

Equally remarkable, as breathing serenest confidence, is the wonderful

filial prayer. Our Lord speaks as if the miracle were already

accomplished, so sure is He: Thou heardest Me.' Does this thanksgiving

bring Him down to the level of other servants of God who have wrought

miracles by divine power granted them? Certainly not; for it is in full

accord with the teaching of all this Gospel, according to which the Son

can do nothing of Himself,' but yet, whatsoever things the Father

doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.' Both sides of the truth must

be kept in view. The Son is not independent of the Father, but the Son

is so constantly and perfectly one with the Father that He is conscious

of unbroken communion, of continual wielding of the whole divine power.

But the practical purpose of the thanksgiving is to be specially noted.

It suspends His whole claims on the single issue about to be decided.

It summons the people to mark the event. Never before had He thus

heralded a miracle. Never had He deigned to say thus solemnly, If God

does not work through Me now, reject Me as an impostor; if He does,

yield to Me as Messiah.' The moment stands alone in His life. What a

scene! There is the open tomb, with its dead occupant; there are the

eager, sceptical crowd, the sisters pausing in their weeping to gaze,

with some strange hopes beginning to creep into their hearts, the

silent disciples, and, in front of them all, Jesus, with the radiance

of power in the eyes that had just been swimming in tears, and a new

elevation in His tones. How all would be hushed in expectance of the

next moment's act!

III. The miracle itself is told in the fewest words. What more was

there to tell? The two ends, as it were, of a buried chain, appear

above ground. Cause and effect were brought together. Rather, here was

no chain of many links, as in physical phenomena, but here was the

life-giving word, and there was the dead man living again. The loud

voice' was as needless as the rolling away of the stone. It was but the

sign of Christ's will acting. And the acting of His will, without any

other cause, produces physical effects.

Lazarus was far away from that rock cave. But, wherever he was, he

could hear, and he must obey. So, with graveclothes entangling his

feet, and a napkin about his livid face, he came stumbling out into the

light that dazed his eyes, closed for four dark days, and stood silent

and motionless in that awestruck crowd. One Person there was not

awestruck. Christ's calm voice, that had just reverberated through the

regions of the dead, spoke the simple command, Loose him, and let him

go.' To Him it was no wonder that He should give back a life. For the

Christ who wept is the Christ whose voice all that are in the graves

shall hear, and shall come forth.

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THE SEVENTH MIRACLE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL -- THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

And when Jesus thus had spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus,

Come forth. 44. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot

with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin.'--JOHN

xi. 43, 44.

The series of our Lord's miracles before the Passion, as recorded in

this Gospel, is fitly closed with the raising of Lazarus. It crowns the

whole, whether we regard the greatness of the fact, the manner of our

Lord's working, the minuteness and richness of the accompanying

details, the revelation of our Lord's heart, the consolations which it

suggests to sorrowing spirits, or the immortal hopes which it kindles.

And besides all this, the miracle is of importance for the development

of the Evangelist's purpose, in that it makes the immediate occasion of

the embittered hostility which finally precipitates the catastrophe of

the Cross. Therefore the great length to which the narrative extends.

Of course it is impossible for us to attempt, even in the most cursory

manner, to go over the whole. We must content ourselves with dealing

with one or two of the salient points. And there are three things in

this narrative which I think well worthy of our notice. There is the

revelation of Christ as our Brother, by emotion and sorrow. There is

the revelation of Christ as our Lord by His consciousness of divine

power. There is the revelation of Christ as our Life by His mighty

life-giving word. And to these three points I ask you to turn briefly.

I. First, then, we have here a revelation of Christ as our Brother, by

emotion and sorrow.

This miracle stands alone in the whole majestic series of His mighty

works by the fact that it is preceded by a storm of emotion, which

shakes the frame of the Master, which He is represented by the

Evangelist not so much as suppressing as fostering, and which diverges

and parts itself into the two feelings expressed by His groans and by

His tears. The word which is rendered in our version He groaned in the

spirit,' and which is twice repeated in the narrative, is, according to

the investigations of the most careful philological commentators,

expressive not only of the outward sign of an emotion, but of the

nature of it. And the nature of the emotion is not merely the grief and

the sympathy which distilled in tears, but it is something deeper and

other than that. The word contains in it at least a tinge of the

passion of indignation' (as it is expressed in the margin of the

Revised Version). What caused the indignation? Cannot we fancy how

there rose up, as in pale, spectral procession before His vision, the

whole long series of human sorrows and losses, of which one was visible

there before Him? He saw, in the one individual case, the whole genus.

He saw the whole mass represented there, the ocean in the drop, and He

looked beyond the fact and linked it with its cause. And as there rose

before Him the reality of man's desolation through sin, and the thought

that all this misery, loss, pain, parting, death, was a contradiction

of the divine purpose, and an interruption of God's order, and that it

had all been pulled down upon men's desperate heads by their own evil

and their own folly, there rose in His heart the anger which is part of

the perfectness of humanity when it looks upon sorrow linked by

adamantine chains with sin.

But the lightning of the wrath dissolved soon into the rain of pity and

of sorrow, and, as we read, Jesus wept.' Looking upon the weeping Mary

and the lamenting crowd, and Himself feeling the pain of the parting

from the friend whom He loved, the tears, which are the confession of

human nature that it is passing through an emotion too deep for words,

came to His all-seeing eyes.

Oh! brethren, surely--surely in this manifestation, or call it better,

this revelation of Christ the Lord, expressed in these two

emotions--surely there are large and blessed lessons for us! On them I

can only touch in the lightest manner. Here, for one thing, is the

blessed sign and proof of His true brotherhood with us. This

Evangelist, to whom it was given to tell the Church and the world more

than any of the others had imparted to them of the divine uniqueness of

the Master's person, had also given to him in charge the corresponding

and complementary message--to insist upon the reality and the verity of

His manhood. His proclamation was the Word was made flesh,' and he had

to dwell on both parts of that message, showing Him as the Word and

showing Him as flesh. So he insists upon all the points which emerge in

the course of his narrative that show the reality of Christ's corporeal

manhood.

He joins with the others, who had no such lofty proclamation entrusted

to them, in telling us how He was bone of our bone, and flesh of our

flesh,' in that He hungered and thirsted and slept, and was wearied;

how He was man, reasonable soul and human spirit, in that He grieved

and rejoiced, and wondered and desired, and mourned and wept. And so we

can look upon Him, and feel that this in very deed is One of ourselves,

with a spirit participant of all human experiences, and a heart

tremulously vibrating with every emotion that belongs to man.

Here we are also taught the sanction and the limits of sorrow.

Christianity has nothing to do with the false Stoicism and the false

religion which is partly pride and partly insincerity, that proclaims

it wrong to weep when God smites. But just as clearly and distinctly as

the story before us says to us, Weep for yourselves and for the loved

ones that are gone,' so distinctly does it draw the limits within which

sorrow is sacred and hallowing, and beyond which it is harmful and

weakening. Set side by side the grief of these two poor weeping

sisters, and the grief of the weeping Christ, and we get a large

lesson. They could only repine that something else had not happened

differently which would have made all different. If Thou hadst been

here, my brother had not died.' One of the two sits with folded arms in

the house, letting her sorrow flow over her pained head. Martha is

unable, by reason of her grief, to grasp the consolation that is held

out to her; her sorrow has made the hopes of the future seem to her

very dim and of small account, and she puts away Thy brother shall rise

again' with almost an impatient sweep of her hand. I know that he will

rise in the resurrection at the last day. But oh! that is so far away,

and what I want is present comfort.' Thus oblivious of duty, murmuring

with regard to the accidents which might have been different, and

unfitted to grasp the hopes that fill the future, these two have been

hurt by their grief, and have let it overflow its banks and lay waste

the land. But this Christ in His sorrow checks His sorrow that He may

do His work; in His sorrow is confident that the Father hears; in His

sorrow thinks of the bystanders, and would bring comfort and cheer to

them. A sorrow which makes us more conscious of communion with the

Father who is always listening, which makes us more conscious of power

to do that which He has put it into our hand to do, which makes us more

tender in our sympathies with all that mourn, and swifter and readier

for our work--such a sorrow is doing what God meant for us; and is a

blessing in so thin a disguise that we can scarcely call it veiled at

all.

And then, still further, there are here other lessons on which I cannot

touch. Such, for instance, is the revelation in this emotion of the

Master's, of a personal love that takes individuals to His heart, and

feels all the sweetness and the power of friendship. That personal love

is open to every one of us, and into the grace and the tenderness of it

we may all penetrate. The disciple whom Jesus loved' is the Evangelist

who, without jealousy, is glad to tell us that the same loving Lord

took into the same sanctuary of His pure heart, Mary and Martha, and

her brother. That which was given to them was not taken from him, and

they each possessed the whole of the Master's love. So for every one of

us that heart is wide open, and you and I, brethren, may contract such

personal relations to the Master that we shall live with Christ as a

man with his friend, and may feel that His heart is all ours.

So much for the lessons of the emotions whereby Christ is manifested to

us as our Brother.

II. And now turn, in the next place, and that very briefly, to what

lies side by side with this in the story, and at first sight may seem

strangely contradictory of it, but in fact only completes the idea,

viz. the majesties, calm consciousness of divine power by which He is

revealed as our Lord.

At one step from the agitation and the storm of feeling there comes,

Take ye away the stone.' And in answer to the lamentations of the

sister are spoken the great and wonderful words, Said I not unto thee

that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?' And

He looks back there to the message that had been sent to the sisters in

response to their unspoken hope that He would come, This sickness is

not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be

glorified thereby.' And He shows us that from the first moment, with

the spontaneousness which, as I have already remarked in previous

sermons on these signs,' characterises all the miracles of John's

Gospel, He Himself knew what He would do,' and in the consciousness of

His divine power had resolved that the dead Lazarus should be the

occasion for the manifestation, the flashing out to the world, of the

glory of God in the life-giving Son.

And then, in the same tone of majestic consciousness, there follows

that thanksgiving prior to the miracle as for the accomplished miracle.

I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me, and I knew that Thou hearest Me

always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they

may believe that Thou hast sent Me.' The best commentary upon these

words, the deepest and the fullest exposition of the large truths that

lie in them concerning the co-operation of the Father and the Son, is

to be found in the passage from the fifth chapter of this Gospel,

wherein there is set forth, drawn with the firmest hand, the clearest

lines of truth upon this great and profound subject. The Son does

nothing of Himself,' but whatsoever the Father doeth, that doeth the

Son likewise.' A consciousness of continual co-operation with the

Almighty Father, a consciousness that His will continually coincides

with the Father's will, that unto Him there comes the power ever to do

all that Omnipotence can do, and that though we may speak of a gift

given and a power derived, the relation between the giving Father and

the recipient Son is altogether different from, and other than the

relation between, the man that asks and the God that bestows. Poor

Martha said, I know that even now, whatsoever Thou askest of God He

will give Thee.' She thought of Him as a good Man whose prayers had

power with Heaven. But up into an altogether other region soars the

consciousness expressed in these words as of a divine Son whose work is

wholly parallel with the Father's work, and of whom the two things that

sound contradictory can both be said. His omnipotence is His own; His

omnipotence is the Father's: As the Father hath life' and therefore

power in Himself, so hath He given'--there is the one half of the

paradox--so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself'; there is

the other. And unless you put them both together you do not think of

Christ as Christ has taught us to think.

III. Lastly, we have here the revelation of Christ as our Life in His

mighty, life-giving word.

The miracle, as I have said, stands high in the scale, not only by

reason of what to us seems the greatness of the fact, though of course,

properly speaking, in miracles there is no distinction as to the

greatness of the fact, but also by reason of the manner of the working.

The voice thrown into the cave reaches the ears of the sheeted dead:

Lazarus, come forth!' And then, in words which convey the profound

impression of awfulness and solemnity which had been made upon the

Evangelist, we have the picture of the man with the graveclothes

wrapped about his limbs, stumbling forth; and loving hands are bidden

to take away the napkin which covered his face. Perhaps the hand

trembled as it was put forth, not knowing what awful sight the veil

might cover.

With tenderest reticence, no word is spoken as to what followed. No

hint escapes of the joy, no gleam of the experiences which the

traveller brought back with him from that bourne' whence he had come.

Surely some draught of Lethe must have been given him, that his spirit

might be lulled into a wholesome forgetfulness, else life must have

been a torment to him.

But be that as it may, what we have to notice is the fact here, and

what it teaches us as a fact. Is it not a revelation of Jesus Christ as

the absolute Lord of Life and Death, giving the one, putting back the

other? Death has caught hold of his prey. Shall the prey be taken from

the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered? Yea, the prey shall be

taken from the mighty.' His bare word is divinely operative. He says to

that grisly shadow Come!' and he cometh; He says to him Go!' and he

goeth. And as a shepherd will drive away the bear that has a lamb

between his bloody fangs, and the brute retreats, snarling and

growling, but dropping his prey, so at the Lord's voice Lazarus comes

back to life, and disappointed Death skulks away to the darkness.

The miracle shows Him as Lord of Death and Giver of Life. And it

teaches another lesson, namely, the continuous persistency of the bond

between Christ and His friend, unbroken and untouched by the

superficial accident of life or death. Wheresoever Lazarus was he heard

the voice, and wheresoever Lazarus was he knew the voice, and

wheresoever Lazarus was he obeyed the voice. And so we are taught that

the relationship between Christ our life, and all them that love and

trust Him, is one on which the tooth of death that gnaws all other

bonds in twain hath no power at all. Christ is the Life, and,

therefore, Christ is the Resurrection, and the thing that we call death

is but a film which spreads on the surface, but has no power to

penetrate into the depths of the relationship between us and Him.

Such, in briefest words, are the lessons of the miracle as a fact, but

before I close I must remind you that it is to be looked at not only as

a fact, but as a prophecy and as a parable.

It is a prophecy in a modified sense, telling us at all events that He

has the power to bid men back from the dust and darkness, and giving us

the assurance which His own words convey to us yet more distinctly: The

hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and

shall come forth.' My brother! there be two resurrections in that one

promise: the resurrection of Christ's friends and the resurrection of

Christ's foes. And though to both His voice will be the awakening, some

shall rise to joy and immortality and some to shame and everlasting

contempt.' You will hear the voice; settle it for yourselves whether

when He calls and thou answerest thou wilt say, Lo! here am I,' joyful

to look upon Him; or whether thou wilt rise reluctant, and call upon

the rocks and the hills to cover thee, and to hide thee from the face

of Him that sitteth upon the Throne.'

And this raising is a parable as well as a prophecy; for even as Christ

was the life of this Lazarus, so, in a deeper and more real sense, and

not in any shadowy, metaphorical, mystical sense, is Jesus Christ the

life of every spirit that truly lives at all. We are dead in trespasses

and sins.' For separation from God is death in all regions, death for

the body in its kind, death for the mind, for the soul, for the spirit

in their kinds; and only they who receive Christ into their hearts do

live. Every Christian man is a miracle. There has been a true coming

into the human of the divine, a true supernatural work, the infusion

into a dead soul of the God-life which is the Christ-life.

And you and I may have that life. What is the condition? They that hear

shall live.' Do you hear? Do you welcome? Do you take that Christ into

your hearts? Is He your Life, my brother?

It is possible to resist that voice, to stuff your ears so full of

clay, and worldliness, and sin, and self-reliance as that it shall not

echo in your hearts. The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead

shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and they that hear shall live,'

and obtain to-day a better resurrection' than the resurrection of the

body. If you do not hear that voice, then you will remain in the

congregation of the dead.'

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CAIAPHAS

And one of them, named Caiaphas being the high priest that same year,

said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is

expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the

whole nation perish not.'--JOHN xi. 49, 50.

The resurrection of Lazarus had raised a wave of popular excitement.

Any stir amongst the people was dangerous, especially at the Passover

time, which was nigh at hand, when Jerusalem would be filled with

crowds of men, ready to take fire from any spark that might fall

amongst them. So a hasty meeting of the principal ecclesiastical

council of the Jews was summoned, in order to dismiss the situation,

and concert measures for repressing the nascent enthusiasm. One might

have expected to find there some disposition to inquire honestly into

the claims of a Teacher who had such a witness to His claims as a man

alive that had been dead. But nothing of the sort appears in their

ignoble calculations. Like all weak men, they feel that something must

be done' and are perfectly unable to say what. They admit Christ's

miracles: This man doeth many miracles,' but they are not a bit the

nearer to recognising His mission, being therein disobedient to their

law and untrue to their office. They fear that any disturbance will

bring Rome's heavy hand down on them, and lead to the loss of what

national life they still possess. But even that fear is not patriotism

nor religion. It is pure self-interest. They will take away our

place'--the Temple, probably--and our nation.' The holy things were, in

their eyes, their special property. And so, at this supreme moment, big

with the fate of themselves and of their nation, their whole anxiety is

about personal interests. They hesitate, and are at a loss what to do.

But however they may hesitate, there is one man who knows his own

mind--Caiaphas, the high priest. He has no doubt as to what is the

right thing to do. He has the advantage of a perfectly clear and single

purpose, and no sort of restraint of conscience or delicacy keeps him

from speaking it out. He is impatient at their vacillation, and he

brushes it all aside with the brusque and contemptuous speech: Ye know

nothing at all!' The one point of view for us to take is that of our

own interests. Let us have that clearly understood; when we once ask

what is "expedient for us," there will be no doubt about the answer.

This man must die. Never mind about His miracles, or His teaching, or

the beauty of His character. His life is a perpetual danger to our

prerogatives. I vote for death!' And so he clashes his advice down into

the middle of their waverings, like a piece of iron into yielding

water; and the strong man, restrained by no conscience, and speaking

out cynically the thought that is floating in all their minds, but

which they dare not utter, is master of the situation, and the resolve

is taken. From that day forth' they determined to put Him to death.

But John regards this selfish, cruel advice as a prophecy. Caiaphas

spoke wiser things than he knew. The Divine Spirit breathed in strange

fashion through even such lips as his, and moulded his savage utterance

into such a form as that it became a fit expression for the very

deepest thought about the nature and the power of Christ's death. He

did indeed die for that people--thinks the Evangelist--even though they

have rejected Him, and the dreaded Romans have come and taken away our

place and nation--but His death had a wider purpose, and was not for

that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the

children of God that are scattered abroad.'

Let us, then, take these two aspects of the man and his counsel: the

unscrupulous priest and his savage advice; the unconscious prophet and

his great prediction.

I. First, then, let us take the former point of view, and think of this

unscrupulous priest and his savage advice. It is expedient for us that

one man die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.'

Remember who he was, the high priest of the nation, with Aaron's mitre

on his brow, and centuries of illustrious traditions embodied in his

person; set by his very office to tend the sacred flame of their

Messianic hopes, and with pure hands and heart to offer sacrifice for

the sins of the people; the head and crown of the national religion, in

whose heart justice and mercy should have found a sanctuary if they had

fled from all others; whose ears ought to have been opened to the

faintest whisper of the voice of God; whose lips should ever have been

ready to witness for the truth.

And see what he is! A crafty schemer, as blind as a mole to the beauty

of Christ's character and the greatness of His words; utterly

unspiritual; undisguisedly selfish; rude as a boor; cruel as a

cut-throat; and having reached that supreme height of wickedness in

which he can dress his ugliest thought in the plainest words, and send

them into the world unabashed. What a lesson this speech of Caiaphas,

and the character disclosed by it, read to all persons who have a

professional connection with religion!

He can take one point of view only, in regard to the mightiest

spiritual revelation that the world ever saw; and that is, its bearing

upon his own miserable personal interests, and the interests of the

order to which he belongs. And so, whatever may be the wisdom, or

miracles, or goodness of Jesus, because He threatens the prerogatives

of the priesthood, He must die and be got out of the way.

This is only an extreme case of a temper and a tendency which is

perennial. Popes and inquisitors and priests of all Churches have done

the same, in their degree, in all ages. They have always been tempted

to look upon religion and religious truth and religious organisations

as existing somehow for their personal advantage. And so the Church is

in danger!' generally means my position is threatened,' and heretics

are got rid of, because their teaching is inconvenient for the

prerogatives of a priesthood, and new truth is fought against, because

officials do not see how it harmonises with their pre-eminence.

It is not popes and priests and inquisitors only that are examples of

the tendency. The warning is needed by every man who stands in such a

position as mine, whose business it is professionally to handle sacred

things, and to administer Christian institutions and Christian ritual.

All such men are tempted to look upon the truth as their

stock-in-trade, and to fight against innovations, and to array

themselves instinctively against progress, and frown down new aspects

and new teachers of truth, simply because they threaten, or appear to

threaten, the position and prerogatives of the teachers that be.

Caiaphas's sin is possible, and Caiaphas's temptation is actual, for

every man whose profession it is to handle the oracles of God.

But the lessons of this speech and character are for us all. Caiaphas's

sentence is an undisguised, unblushing avowal of a purely selfish

standpoint. It is not a common depth of degradation to stand up, and

without a blush to say: I look at all claims of revelation, at all

professedly spiritual truth, and at everything else, from one

delightfully simple point of view--I ask myself, how does it bear upon

what I think to be to my advantage?' What a deal of perplexity a man is

saved if he takes up that position! Yes! and how he has damned himself

in the very act of doing it! For, look what this absorbing and

exclusive self-regard does in the illustration before us, and let us

learn what it will do to ourselves.

This selfish consideration of our own interests will make us as blind

as bats to the most radiant beauty of truth; aye, and to Christ

Himself, if the recognition of Him and of His message seems to threaten

any of these. They tell us that fishes which live in the water of

caverns come to lose their eyesight; and men that are always living in

the dark holes of their own selfishly absorbed natures, they, too, lose

their spiritual sight; and the fairest, loftiest, truest, and most

radiant visions (which are realities) pass before their eyes, and they

see them not. When you put on regard for yourselves as they do blinkers

upon horses, you have no longer the power of wide, comprehensive

vision, but only see straight forward upon the narrow line which you

fancy to be marked out by your own interests. If ever there comes into

the selfish man's mind a truth, or an aspect of Christ's mission, which

may seem to cut against some of his practices or interests, how blind

he is to it! When Lord Nelson was at Copenhagen, and they hoisted the

signal of recall, he put his telescope up to his blind eye and said, I

do not see it!' And that is exactly what this self-absorbed regard to

our own interests does with hundreds of men who do not in the least

degree know it. It blinds them to the plain will of the

Commander-in-chief flying there at the masthead. There are none so

blind as those who will not see'; and there are none who so certainly

will not see as those who have an uneasy suspicion that if they do see

they will have to change their tack. So I say, look at the instance

before us, and learn the lesson of the blindness to truth and beauty

which are Christ Himself, which comes of a regard to one's own

interests.

Then again, this same self-regard may bring a man down to any kind and

degree of wrongdoing. Caiaphas was brought down by it, being the

supreme judge of his nation, to be an assassin and an accomplice of

murderers. And it is only a question of accident and of circumstances

how far that man will descend who once yields himself up to the

guidance of such a disposition and tendency. We have all of us to fight

against the developed selfishness which takes the form of this, that,

and the other sin; and we have all of us, if we are wise, to fight

against the undeveloped sin which lies in all selfishness. Remember

that if you begin with laying down as the canon of your conduct, It is

expedient for me,' you have got upon an inclined plane that tilts at a

very sharp angle, and is very sufficiently greased, and ends away down

yonder in the depths of darkness and of death, and it is only a

question of time how far and how fast, how deep and irrevocable, will

be your descent.

And lastly, this same way of looking at things which takes It is

expedient' as the determining consideration, has in it an awful power

of so twisting and searing a man's conscience as that he comes to look

at evil and never to know that there is anything wrong in it. This

cynical high priest in our text had no conception that he was doing

anything but obeying the plainest dictates of the most natural

self-preservation when he gave his opinion that they had better kill

Christ than have any danger to their priesthood. The crime of the

actual crucifixion was diminished because the doers were so unconscious

that it was a crime; but the crime of the process by which they had

come to be unconscious--Oh how that was increased and deepened! So, if

we fix our eyes sharply and exclusively on what makes for our own

advantage, and take that as the point of view from which we determine

our conduct, we may, and we shall, bring ourselves into such a

condition as that our consciences will cease to be sensitive to right

and wrong; and we shall do all manner of bad things, and never know it.

We shall wipe our mouths and say: "I have done no harm."' So, I beseech

you, remember this, that to live for self is hell, and that the only

antagonist of such selfishness, which leads to blindness, crime, and a

seared conscience, is to yield ourselves to the love of God in Jesus

Christ and to say: I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'

II. And now turn briefly to the second aspect of this saying, into

which the former, if I may so say, melts away. We have the unconscious

prophet and his great prediction.

The Evangelist conceives that the man who filled the office of high

priest, being the head of the theocratic community, was naturally the

medium of a divine oracle. When he says, being the high priest that

year, Caiaphas prophesied,' he does not imply that the high priestly

office was annual, but simply desires to mark the fateful importance of

that year for the history of the world and the priesthood. In that

year' the great High Priest for ever' came and stood for a moment by

the side of the earthly high priest--the Substance by the shadow--and

by His offering of Himself as the one Sacrifice for sin for ever,

deprived priesthood and sacrifice henceforward of all their validity.

So that Caiaphas was in reality the last of the high priests, and those

that succeeded him for something less than half a century were but like

ghosts that walked after cock-crow. And what the Evangelist would mark

is the importance of that year,' as making Caiaphas ever memorable to

us. Solemn and strange that the long line of Aaron's priesthood ended

in such a man--the river in a putrid morass--and that of all the years

in the history of the nation, in that year' should such a person fill

such an office!

Being high priest he prophesied.' And was there anything strange in a

bad man's prophesying? Did not the Spirit of God breathe through Balaam

of old? Is there anything incredible in a man's prophesying

unconsciously? Did not Pilate do so, when he nailed over the Cross,

This is the King of the Jews,' and wrote it in Hebrew, and in Greek,

and in Latin, conceiving himself to be perpetrating a rude jest, while

he was proclaiming an everlasting truth? When the Pharisees stood at

the foot of the Cross and taunted Him, He saved others, Himself He

cannot save,' did they not, too, speak deeper things than they knew?

And were not the lips of this unworthy, selfish, unspiritual,

unscrupulous, cruel priest so used as that, all unconsciously, his

words lent themselves to the proclamation of the glorious central truth

of Christianity, that Christ died for the nation that slew Him and

rejected Him, nor for them alone, but for all the world? Look, though

but for a moment, at the thoughts that come from this new view of the

words which we have been considering.

They suggest to us, first of all, the twofold aspect of Christ's death.

From the human point of view it was a savage murder by forms of law for

political ends: Caiaphas and the priests slaying Him to avoid a popular

tumult that might threaten their prerogatives, Pilate consenting to His

death to avoid the unpopularity that might follow a refusal. From the

divine point of view it is God's great sacrifice for the sin of the

world. It is the most signal instance of that solemn law of Providence

which runs all through the history of the world, whereby bad men's bad

deeds, strained through the fine network, as it were, of the divine

providence, lose their poison and become nutritious and fertilising.

Thou makest the wrath of men to praise Thee; with the residue thereof

Thou girdest Thyself.' The greatest crime ever done in the world is the

greatest blessing ever given to the world. Man's sin works out the

loftiest divine purpose, even as the coral insects blindly build up the

reef that keeps back the waters, or as the sea in its wild, impotent

rage, seeking to overwhelm the land, only throws upon the beach a

barrier that confines its waves and curbs their fury.

Then, again, this second aspect of the counsel of Caiaphas suggests for

us the twofold consequences of that death on the nation itself. This

Gospel of John was probably written after the destruction of Jerusalem.

By the time that our Evangelist penned these words, the Romans had come

and taken away their place and their nation. The catastrophe that

Caiaphas and his party had, by their short-sighted policy, tried to

prevent, had been brought about by the very deed itself. For Christ's

death was practically the reason for the destruction of the Jewish

commonwealth. When the husbandmen said, Come! let us kill Him, and

seize on the inheritance,' which is simply putting Caiaphas's counsel

into other language, they thereby deprived themselves of the

inheritance. And so Christ's death was the destruction and not the

salvation of the nation.

And yet, it was true that He died for that people, for every man of

them, for Caiaphas as truly as for John, for Judas as truly as for

Peter, for all the Scribes and the Pharisees that mocked round His

Cross, as truly as for the women that stood silently weeping there. He

died for them all, and John, looking back upon the destruction of his

nation, can yet say, He died for that people.' Yes! and just because He

did, and because they rejected Him, His death, which they would not let

be their salvation, became their destruction and their ruin. Oh!

brethren, it is always so! He is either a savour of life unto life, or

a savour of death unto death!' Behold! I lay in Zion for a foundation,

a tried Stone.' Build upon it and you are safe. If you do not build

upon it, that Stone becomes a stone of stumbling and a rock of

offence.' You must either build upon Christ or fall over Him; you must

either build upon Christ, or be crushed to powder under Him. Make your

choice! The twofold effect is wrought ever, but we can choose which of

the two shall be wrought upon us.

Lastly, we have here the twofold sphere in which our Lord's mighty

death works its effects.

I have already said that this Gospel was written after the fall of

Jerusalem. The whole tone of it shows that the conception of the Church

as quite separate from Judaism was firmly established. The narrower

national system had been shivered, and from out of the dust and hideous

ruin of its crushing fall had emerged the fairer reality of a Church as

wide as the world. The Temple on Zion--which was but a small building

after all--had been burned with fire. It was their place, as Caiaphas

called it. But the clearing away of the narrower edifice had revealed

the rising walls of the great temple, the Christian Church, whose roof

overarches every land, and in whose courts all men may stand and praise

the Lord. So John, in his home in Ephesus, surrounded by flourishing

churches in which Jews formed a small and ever-decreasing element,

recognised how far the dove with the olive-branch In its mouth flew,

and how certainly that nation was only a little fragment of the many

for whom Christ died.

The children of God that were scattered abroad' were all to be united

round that Cross. Yes! the only thing that unites men together is their

common relation to a Divine Redeemer. That bond is deeper than all

national bonds, than all blood-bonds, than community of race, than

family, than friendship, than social ties, than community of opinion,

than community of purpose and action. It is destined to absorb them

all. All these are transitory and they are imperfect; men wander

isolated notwithstanding them all. But if we are knit to Christ, we are

knit to all who are also knit to Him. One life animates all the limbs,

and one life's blood circulates through all the veins. So also is

Christ.' We are one in Him, in whom all the body fitly joined together

maketh increase, and in whom all the building fitly framed together

groweth. If we have yielded to the power of that Cross which draws us

to itself, we shall have been more utterly alone, in our penitence and

in our conscious surrender to Christ, than ever we were before. But He

sets the solitary in families, and that solemn experience of being

alone with our Judge and our Saviour will be followed by the blessed

sense that we are no more solitary, but fellow-citizens with the saints

and of the household of God.'

That death brings men into the family of God. He will gather into one

the scattered children of God.' They are called children by

anticipation. For surely nothing can be clearer than that the doctrine

of all John's writings is that men are not children of God by virtue of

their humanity, except in the inferior sense of being made by Him, and

in His image as creatures with spirit and will, but become children of

God through faith in the Son of God, which brings about that new birth,

whereby we become partakers of the Divine nature. To as many as

received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to

them that believe on His name.'

So I beseech you, turn yourselves to that dear Christ who has died for

us all, for us each, for me and for thee, and put your confidence in

His great sacrifice. You will find that you pass from isolation into

society, from death into life, from the death of selfishness into the

life of God. Listen to Him, who says: Other sheep I have which are not

of this fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice: and

there shall be one flock' because there is one Shepherd.'

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LOVE'S PRODIGALITY CENSURED AND VINDICATED

Then Jesus, six days before the passover, came to Bethany, where

Lazarus was which had been dead, whom He raised from the dead. There

they made Him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them

that sat at the table with Him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of

spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His

feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the

ointment. Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son,

which should betray Him, Why was not this ointment sold for three

hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared

for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare

what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day

of My burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you;

but Me ye have not always. Much people of the Jews therefore knew that

He was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they

might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief

priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; because

that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on

Jesus.'--JOHN xii. 1-11.

Jesus came from Jericho, where He had left Zacchaeus rejoicing in the

salvation that had come to his house, and whence Bartimaeus, rejoicing

in His new power of vision, seems to have followed Him. A few hours

brought Him to Bethany, and we know from other Evangelists what a

tension of purpose marked Him, and awed the disciples, as He pressed on

before them up the rocky way. His mind was full of the struggle and

death which were so near. The modest village feast in the house of

Simon the leper comes in strangely amid the gathering gloom; but, no

doubt, Jesus accepted it, as He did everything, and entered into the

spirit of the hour. He would not pain His hosts by self-absorbed

aloofness at the table. The reason for the feast is obviously the

raising of Lazarus, as is suggested by his being twice mentioned in

verses 1 and 2.

Our Lord had withdrawn to Ephraim so immediately after the miracle that

the opportunity of honouring Him had not occurred. It was a brave

tribute to pay Him in the face of the Sanhedrim's commandment (ch. xi.

57). This incident sets in sharpest contrast the two figures of Mary,

the type of love which delights to give its best, and Judas, the type

of selfishness which is only eager to get; and it shows us Jesus

casting His shield over the uncalculating giver, and putting meaning

into her deed.

I. In Eastern fashion, the guests seem to have all been males, no doubt

the magnates of the village, and Jesus with His disciples. The former

would have become accustomed to seeing Lazarus, but Christ's immediate

followers would gaze curiously on him. And how he would gaze on Jesus,

whom he had probably not seen since the napkin had been taken from his

face. The two sisters were true to their respective characters. The

bustling, practical Martha had perhaps not very fine or quickly moved

emotions. She could not say graceful things to their benefactor, and

probably she did not care to sit at His feet and drink in His teaching;

but she loved Him with all her heart all the same, and showed it by

serving. No doubt, she took care that the best dishes were carried to

Jesus first, and, no doubt, as is the custom in those lands, she plied

Him with invitations to partake. We do Martha less than justice if we

do not honour her, and recognise that her kind of service is true

service. She has many successors among Christ's true followers, who

cannot gush' nor rise to the heights of His loftiest teaching, but who

have taken Him for their Lord, and can, at any rate, do humble,

practical service in kitchen or workshop. Their more intellectual' or

poetically emotional brethren are tempted to look down on them, but

Jesus is as ready to defend Martha against Mary, if she depreciates

her, as He is to vindicate Mary's right to her kind of expression of

love, if Martha should seek to force her own kind on her sister. There

are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.'

Mary was one of the unpractical sort, whom Martha is very apt to

consider supremely useless, and often to lose patience with. Could she

not find something useful to do in all the bustle of the feast? Had she

no hands that could carry a dish, and no common sense that could help

things on? Apparently not. Every one else was occupied, and how should

she show the love that welled up in her heart as she looked at Lazarus

sitting there beside Jesus? She had one costly possession, the pound of

perfume. Clearly it was her own, for she would not have taken it if

Lazarus and Mary had been joint owners. So, without thinking of

anything but the great burden of love which she blessedly bore, she

poured it on His head' (Mark) and on His feet, which the fashion of

reclining at meals made accessible to her, standing behind Him, True

love is profuse, not to say prodigal. It knows no better use for its

best than to lavish it on the beloved, and can have no higher joy than

that. It does not stay to calculate utility as seen by colder eyes. It

has even a subtle delight in the very absence of practical results, for

the expression of itself is the purer thereby. A basin of water and a

towel would have done as well or better for washing Christ's feet, but

not for relieving Mary's full heart. Do we know anything of that

omnipotent impulse? Can we complacently set our givings beside Mary's?

II. Judas is the foil to Mary. His sullen, black selfishness,

stretching out hands like talons in eagerness to get, makes more

radiant, and is itself made darker by, her shining deed of love.

Goodness always rouses evil to self-assertion, and the other

Evangelists connect Mary's action with Judas's final treachery as part

of its impelling cause. They also show that his specious objection, by

its apparent common sense and charitableness, found assent in the

disciples. Three hundred pence worth of good ointment wasted which

might have helped so many poor! Yes, and how much poorer the world

would have been if it had not had this story! Mary was more utilitarian

than her censors. She served the highest good of all generations by her

uncalculating profusion, by which the poor have gained more than some

few of them might have lost.

Judas's criticism is still repeated. The world does not understand

Christian self-sacrifice, for ends which seem to it shadowy as compared

with the solid realities of helping material progress or satisfying

material wants. A hundred critics, who do not do much for the poor

themselves, will descant on the waste of money in religious

enterprises, and smile condescendingly at the enthusiasts who are so

unpractical. But love knows its own meaning, and need not be abashed by

the censure of the unloving.

John flashes out into a moment's indignation at the greed of Judas,

which was masquerading as benevolence. His scathing laying bare of

Judas's mean and thievish motive is no mere suspicion, but he must have

known instances of dishonesty. When a man has gone so far in selfish

greed that he has left common honesty behind him, no wonder if the

sight of utterly self-surrendering love looks to him folly. The world

has no instruments by which it can measure the elevation of the godly

life. Mary would not be Mary if Judas approved of her or understood

her.

III. Jesus vindicates the act of His censured servant. His words fall

into two parts, of which the former puts a meaning into Mary's act, of

which she probably had not been aware, while the latter meets the

carping criticism of Judas. That Jesus should see in the anointing a

reference to His burying, pathetically indicates how that near end

filled His thoughts, even while sharing in the simple feast. The clear

vision of the Cross so close did not so absorb Him as to make Him

indifferent either to Mary's love or to the villagers' humble

festivity. However weighed upon, His heart was always sufficiently at

leisure from itself to care for His friends and to defend them. He

accepts every offering that love brings, and, in accepting, gives it a

significance beyond the offerer's thought. We know not what use He may

make of our poor service; but we may be sure that, if that which we can

see to is right--namely, its motive,--He will take care of what we

cannot see to--namely, its effect,--and will find noble use for the

sacrifices which unloving critics pronounce useless waste.

The poor always ye have with you.' Opportunities for the exercise of

brotherly liberality are ever present, and therefore the obligation to

it is constant. But these permanent duties do not preclude the

opportunities for such special forms of expressing special love to

Jesus as Mary had shown, and as must soon end. The same sense of

approaching separation as in the former clause gives pathos to that

restrained not always.' The fact of His being just about to leave them

warranted extraordinary tokens of love, as all loving hearts know but

too well. But, over and above the immediate reference of the words,

they carry the wider lesson that, besides the customary duties of

generous giving laid on us by the presence of ordinary poverty and

distresses, there is room in Christian experience for extraordinary

outflows from the fountain of a heart filled with love to Christ. The

world may mock at it as useless prodigality, but Jesus sees that it is

done for Him, and therefore He accepts it, and breathes meaning into

it.

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.' The Evangelist who records that promise does not mention Mary's

name; John, who does mention the name, does not record the promise. It

matters little whether our names are remembered, so long as Jesus beam

them graven on His heart.

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A NEW KIND OF KING

On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they

heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm-trees,

and went forth to meet Him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of

Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus, when He had

found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of

Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt. These things

understood not His disciples at the first: but when Jesus was

glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him,

and that they had done these things unto Him. The people therefore that

was with Him when He called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him

from the dead, bare record. For this cause the people also met Him, for

that they heard that He had done this miracle. The Pharisees therefore

said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing! behold, the

world is gone after Him. And there were certain Greeks among them that

came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip,

which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we

would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and

Philip tell Jesus, and Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come,

that the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto

you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth

alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his

life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall

keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and

where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him

will My Father honour.'--JOHN xii. 12-26.

The difference between John's account of the entry into Jerusalem and

those of the Synoptic Gospels is very characteristic. His is much

briefer, but it brings the essentials out clearly, and is particular in

showing its place as a link in the chain that drew on the final

catastrophe, and in noting its effect on various classes.

The next day' in verse 12 was probably the Sunday before the

crucifixion. To understand the events of that day we must try to

realise how rapidly, and, as the rulers thought, dangerously,

excitement was rising among the crowds who had come up for the

Passover, and who had heard of the raising of Lazarus. The Passover was

always a time when national feeling was ready to blaze up, and any

spark might light the fire. It looked as if Lazarus were going to be

the match this time, and so, on the Saturday, the rulers had made up

their minds to have him put out of the way in order to stop the current

that was setting in, of acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah.

They had already made up their minds to dispose of Jesus, and now, with

cynical contempt for justice, they determined to put Lazarus also to

death.' So there were to be two men who were to die for the people.'

Keeping all this wave of popular feeling in view, it might have been

expected that Jesus would, as hitherto, have escaped into privacy, or

discouraged the offered homage of a crowd whose Messianic ideal was so

different from His.

John is mainly concerned in bringing out two points in his version of

the incident. First, he tells us what we should not have gathered from

the other Evangelists, that the triumphal procession began in

Jerusalem, not in Bethany. It was the direct result of the ebullition

of enthusiasm occasioned by the raising of Lazarus. The course of

events seems to have been that the common people of the Jews' came

streaming out to Bethany on the Sunday to gape and gaze at the risen

man and Him who had raised him, that they and some of those who had

been present at the raising went back to the city and carried thither

the intelligence that Jesus was coming in from Bethany next day, and

that then the procession to meet Him was organised.

The meaning of the popular demonstration was plain, both from the palm

branches, signs of victory and rejoicing, and from the chant, which is

in part taken from Psalm cxviii. The Messianic application of that

quotation is made unmistakable by the addition, even the King of

Israel.' In the Psalm, he that cometh in the name of Jehovah,' means

the worshipper drawing near to the Temple, but the added words divert

the expression to Jesus, hail Him as the King, and invoke Him as

Saviour.' Little did that shouting crowd understand what sort of a

Saviour He was. Deliverance from Rome was what they were thinking of.

We must remember what gross, unspiritual notions of the Messiah they

had, and then we are prepared to feel how strangely unlike His whole

past conduct Jesus' action now was. He had shrunk from crowds and their

impure enthusiasm; He had slipped away into solitude when they wished

to come by force to make Him a King, and had in every possible way

sought to avoid publicity and the rousing of popular excitement. Now He

deliberately sets Himself to intensify it. His choice of an ass on

which to ride into Jerusalem was, and would be seen by many to be, a

plain appropriation to Himself of a very distinct Messianic prophecy,

and must have raised the heat of the crowd by many degrees. One can

fancy the roar of acclaim which hailed Him when He met the multitude,

and the wild emotion with which they strewed His path with garments

hastily drawn off and cast before Him.

Why did He thus contradict all His past, and court the smoky enthusiasm

which He had hitherto damped? Because He knew that His hour' had come,

and that the Cross was at hand, and He desired to bring it as speedily

as might be, and thus to shorten the suffering that He would not avoid,

and to finish the work which He was eager to complete. The impatience,

as we might almost call it, which had marked Him on all that last

journey, reached its height now, and may indicate to us for our

sympathy and gratitude both His human longing to get the dark hour over

and His fixed willingness to die for us.

But even while Jesus accepted the acclamations and deliberately set

Himself to stir up enthusiasm, He sought to purify the gross ideas of

the crowd. What more striking way could He have chosen of declaring

that all the turbulent passions and eagerness for a foot-to-foot

conflict with Rome which were boiling in their breasts were alien to

His purposes and to the true Messianic ideal, than that choosing of the

meek, slow-pacing ass to bear Him? A conquering king would have made

his triumphal entry in a chariot or on a battle-horse. This strange

type of monarch is throned on an ass. It was not only for a verbal

fulfilment of the prophecy, but for a demonstration of the essential

nature of His kingdom, that He thus entered the city.

John characteristically takes note of the effects of the entry on two

classes, the disciples and the rulers. The former remembered with a

sudden flash of enlightenment the meaning of the entry when the Cross

and the Resurrection had taught them it. The rulers marked the popular

feeling running high with bewilderment, and were, as Jesus meant them

to be, made more determined to take vigorous measures to stop this

madness of the mob.

The second incident in this passage contrasts remarkably with the

first, and yet is, in one aspect, a continuation of it. In the former,

Jesus brought into prominence the true nature of His rule by His

choosing the ass to carry Him, so declaring that His dominion rested,

not on conquest, but on meekness. In the latter, He reveals a yet

deeper aspect of His work, and teaches that His influence over men is

won by utter self-sacrifice, and that His subjects must tread the same

path of losing their lives by which He passes to His glory. The details

of the incident are of small importance as compared with that great and

solemn lesson; but we may note them in a few words. The desire of a few

Greeks to see Him was probably only a reflection of the popular

enthusiasm, and was prompted mainly by curiosity and the characteristic

Greek eagerness to see any new thing.' The addressing of the request to

Philip is perhaps explained by the fact that he was of Bethsaida of

Galilee,' and had probably come into contact with these Greeks in the

neighbouring Decapolis, on the other side of the lake. Philip's

consultation of his fellow-townsman, Andrew, who is associated with him

in other places, probably implies hesitation in granting so

unprecedented a request. They did not know what Jesus might say to it.

And what He did say was very unlike anything that they could have

anticipated.

The trivial request was as a narrow window through which Jesus'

yearning spirit saw a great expanse--nothing less than the coming to

Him of myriads of Gentiles, the much fruit' of which He immediately

speaks, the other sheep' whom He must bring.' The thought must have

been ever present to Him, or it would never have leaped to utterance on

such an occasion. The little window shows us, too, what was habitually

in His mind and heart. He, as it were, hears the striking of the hour

of His glorification; in which expression the ideas of His being

glorified by drawing men to the knowledge of His love, and of the Cross

being not the lowest depth of His humiliation, but the highest apex of

His glory--as it is always represented in this Gospel--seemed to be

fused together.

The seed must die if a harvest is to spring from it. That is the law

for all moral and spiritual reformations. Every cause must have its

martyrs. No man can be fruit-bearing unless he sacrifices himself. We

shall not quicken' our fellows unless we die,' either literally or by

the not less real martyrdom of rigid self-crucifixion and suppression.

But that necessity is not only for Apostles or missionaries of great

causes; it is the condition of all true, noble life, and prescribes the

path not only for those who would live for others, but for all who

would truly live their own lives. Self-renunciation guards the way to

the tree of life.' That lesson was specially needed by Greeks,' for

ignorance of it was the worm that gnawed the blossoms of their trees,

whether of art or of literature. It is no less needed by our sensuously

luxurious and eagerly acquisitive generation. The world's war-cries

to-day are two--Get!' Enjoy!' Christ's command is, Renounce!' And in

renouncing we shall realise both of these other aims, which they who

pursue them only, never attain.

Christ's servant must be Christ's follower: indeed service is

following. The Cross has aspects in which it stands alone, and is

incapable of being reproduced and makes all repetition needless. But it

has also an aspect in which it not only may, but must, be reproduced in

every disciple. And he who takes it for the ground of his trust only,

and not as the pattern of his life, has need to ask himself whether his

trust in it is genuine or worth anything. Of course they who follow a

leader will arrive where the leader has gone, and though our feet are

feeble and our progress devious and slow, we have here His promise that

we shall not be lost in the desert, but, sustained by Him, will reach

His side, and at last be where He is.

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AFTER CHRIST: WITH CHRIST

If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall

also My servant be.'--JOHN xii. 26.

Our Lord was strangely moved by the apparently trivial incident of

certain Greeks desiring to see Him. He recognised and hailed in them

the first-fruits of the Gentiles. The Eastern sages at His cradle, and

these representatives of Western culture within a few hours of the

Cross, were alike prophets. So, in His answer to their request, our

Lord passes beyond the immediate bearing of the request, and

contemplates it in its relation to the future developments of His work.

And the thought that the Son of Man is now about to begin to be

glorified, at once brings Him face to face with the fact which must

precede the glory, viz., His death.

That great law that a higher life can only be reached by the decay of

the lower, of which the Cross is the great instance, He illustrates,

first, by an example from Nature, the corn of wheat which must die ere

it brings forth fruit. Then He declares that this is a universal law,

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in

this world shall keep it unto life eternal.' And then He declares that

this universal law, which has its adumbration in Nature, and applies to

all mankind, and is manifested in its highest form on the Cross, is the

law of the Christian discipleship. If any man serve Me, let him follow

Me,' and, as a consequence, where I am, there shall also My servant

be.'

In two clauses He covers the whole ground of the present and the

future. Many thinkers and teachers have tried to crystallise their

systems into some brief formula which may stick in the memory and be

capable of a handy application. Follow Nature,' said ancient sages,

attaching a nobler meaning to the condensed commandment than its modern

repeaters often do; Follow duty,' say others; Follow Me' says Christ.

That is enough for life. And for all the dim regions beyond, this

prospect is sufficient, Where I am, there shall also My servant be.'

One Form towers above the present and the future, and they both derive

their colouring and their worth from Him and our relation to Him. To

follow'--that is the condensed summary of life's duty. To be

with'--that is the crystallising of all our hopes.

I. The all-sufficient law for life.

If any man serve Me, let him follow Me.' Everything is smelted down

into that; and there you have a sufficient directory for every man's

every action.

Now although it has nothing to do with my present purpose, I can

scarcely avoid pausing, just for a moment, to ask you to consider the

perfect uniqueness of such an utterance as that. Think of one Man

standing up before all mankind, and coolly and deliberately saying to

them, I am the realised Ideal of human conduct; I am Incarnate

Perfection; and all of you, in all the infinite variety of condition,

culture, and character, are to take Me for your pattern and your

guide.' The world has listened, and the world has not laughed nor been

angry. Neither indignation nor mockery, which one might have expected

would have extinguished such absurdity, has waited upon Christ's

utterance. I have no time to dwell on this; it is apart from my

purpose, but I would ask you fairly to consider how strange it is, and

to ask how it is to be accounted for, that a Man said that, and that

the wisest part of the world has consented to take Him at His own

valuation; and after such an utterance as that, yet calls Him meek and

lowly of heart.'

But I pass away from that. What does He mean by this commandment,

Follow Me'? Of course I need not remind you that it brings all duty

down to the imitation of Jesus Christ. That is a commonplace that I do

not need to dwell upon, nor to follow out into the many regions into

which it would lead us, and where we might find fruitful subjects of

contemplation; because I desire, in a sentence or two, to insist upon

the special form of following which is here enjoined. It is a very

grand thing to talk about the imitation of Christ, and even in its most

superficial acceptation it is a good guide for all men. But no man has

penetrated to the depths of that stringent and all-comprehensive

commandment who has not recognised that there is one special thing in

which Christ is to be our Pattern, and that is in regard to the very

thing in which we think that He is most unique and inimitable. It is

His Cross, and not His life; it is His death, and not His virtues,

which He is here thinking about, and laying it upon all of us as the

encyclopaedia and sum of all morality that we should be conformed to

it. I have already pointed out to you in my introductory remarks the

force of the present context. And so I need not further enlarge upon

that, nor vindicate my declaration that Christ's death is the pattern

which is here set before us. Of course we cannot imitate that in its

effects, except in a very secondary and figurative fashion. But the

spirit that underlay it, as the supreme Example of self-sacrifice, is

commended to us all as the royal law for our lives, and unless we are

conformed thereto we have no right to call ourselves Christ's

disciples. To die for the sake of higher life, to give up our own will

utterly in obedience to God, and in the unselfish desire to help and

bless others, that is the Alpha and the Omega of discipleship. It

always has been so and always will be so. And so, dear brethren, let us

lay it to our own hearts, and make very stringent inquiry into our own

conduct, whether we have ever come within sight of what makes a true

disciple--viz., that we should be conformable unto His death.'

Now our modern theology has far too much obscured this plain teaching

of the New Testament, because it has been concerned--I do not say too

much, but too exclusively, concerned--in setting forth the other aspect

of Christ's death, by which it is what none of ours can ever even begin

to be, the sacrifice for a world's sin. But, mind, there are two ways

of looking at Christ's Cross. You must begin with recognising it as the

basis of all your hope, the power by which you are delivered from sin

as guilt, habit, and condemnation. And then you must take it, if it is

to be the sacrifice and atonement for your sins, for the example of

your lives, and mould yourselves after it. If any man serve Me, let him

follow Me,' and here is the special region in which the following is to

be realised: He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth

his life shall keep it unto life eternal.'

Now, further, let me remind you that this brief, crystallised

commandment, the essence of all practical godliness and Christianity,

makes the blessed peculiarity of Christian morality. People ask what it

is that distinguishes the teaching of the New Testament in regard to

duty, from the teaching of lofty moralists and sages of old. Not the

specific precepts, though these are, in many cases, deeper. Not the

individual commandments, though the perspective of human excellences

and virtues has been changed in Christianity, and the gentler and

sweeter graces have been enthroned in the place where the world's

morality has generally set the more ostentatious ones; the hero is,

roughly speaking, the world's type, the saint is the New Testament's.

But the true characteristic of Christian teaching as to conduct lies in

this, that the law is in a Person, and that the power to obey the law

comes from the love of the Person. All things are different; unwelcome

duties are made less repulsive, and hard tasks are lightened, and

sorrows are made tolerable, if only we are following Him. You remember

the old story in Scottish history of the knight to whom was entrusted

the king's heart; how, beset by the bands of the infidels, he tossed

the golden casket into the thickest of their ranks and said, Go on, I

follow thee'; and death itself was light when that thought spurred his

steed forward.

And so, brethren, it is far too hard a task to tread the road of duty

which our consciences command us, unless we are drawn by Him Who is

before us there on the road, and see the shining of His garments as He

sets His face forward, and draws us after Him. It is easy to climb a

glacier when the guide has cut with his ice-axe the steps in which he

sets his feet, and we may set ours. The sternness of duty, and the

rigidity of law, and the coldness of I ought,' are all changed when

duty consists in following Christ, and He is before us on the rocky and

narrow road.

This precept is all-sufficient. Of course it will be a task of wisdom,

of common sense, of daily culture in prudence and other graces; to

apply the generalised precept to the specific cases that emerge in our

lives. But whilst the application may require a great many subordinate

by-laws, the royal statute is one, and simple, and enough. Follow Me.'

Is it not a strange thing--it seems to me to be a perfectly unique

thing, inexplicable except upon one hypothesis--that a life so brief,

of which the records are so fragmentary, in which some of the

relationships in which we stand had no place, and which was lived out

in a world so utterly different from our own, should yet avail to be a

guide to men, not in regard to specific points, so much as in regard to

the imperial supremacy in it of these motives--Even Christ pleased not

Himself; My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me.'

And so, brethren, take this sharp test and apply it honestly to your

own lives, day by day, in all their minutiae as well as in their great

things. If any man serve Me,' how miserably that Christian service' has

been evacuated of its deepest meaning, and superficialised and

narrowed! Service'--that means people getting into a building and

singing and praying. Service--that means acts of beneficence, teaching

and preaching and giving material or spiritual helps of various kinds.

These things have almost monopolised the word. But Christ enlarges its

shrivelled contents once more, and teaches us that, far above all

specifically so-called acts of religious worship, and more

indispensable than so-called acts of Christian activity and service,

lies the self-sacrificing conformity of character to Him. If any man

serve Me,' let him sing and praise and pray? Yes; If any man serve Me,'

let him try to help other people, and in the service of man do service

to Me? Yes; but deeper than all, and fundamental to the others, If any

man serve Me, let him follow Me'--Is that my discipleship? Let each one

of us professing Christians ask himself.

II. We have here the all-sufficient hope for the future.

I know few things more beautiful than the perfectly naive way in which

the greatest of thoughts is here set forth by the simplest of figures.

If two men are walking on the same road to a place, the one that is in

front will get there first, and his friend that is coming up after him

will get there second, if he keeps on; and they will be united at the

end, because, one after the other, they travel the road. And so says

Christ: Of course, if you follow Me, you will join Me; and where I am,

there shall also My servant be.' The implications of a Christian life,

which is true following of Christ here, necessarily led to the

confidence that in that future there will be union with Him. That is a

deep thought, which might afford material for much to be said, but on

which I cannot dwell now.

I remarked at an early stage of this sermon how singular it was that

our Lord should present Himself as the Pattern for all human

excellence. Is it not even more singular that He should venture to

present His own companionship as the sufficient recompense for every

sorrow, for every effort, for all pain, for all pilgrimage? To be with

Him, He thinks, is enough for any man and enough for all men. Who did

He think Himself to be? What did He suppose His relation to the rest of

us to be, who could thus calmly suggest to the world that the only

thing that a heart needed for blessedness was to be beside Him? And we

believe it, too little as it influences our lives. To be with Christ'

is very much better'; better than all beneath the stars; better than

all on this side eternity.

What does our Lord mean by this all-sufficient hope? We know very

little of that dim region beyond, but we know that until He comes again

His departed servants are absent from the body. And, in our sense of

the word, there can be no place for spirits thus free from corporeal

environment. And so place, to-day at all events for the departed

saints, and in a subordinate degree all through eternity, even when

they are clothed with a glorified body, must be but a symbol of state,

of condition, of spiritual character. Where I am there shall My servant

be,' means specially What I am, that shall My servant be.' This perfect

conformity to that dear Lord, whose footsteps we have followed;

assimilation there, which is the issue of imitation here, though broken

and imperfect, this is the hope that may gladden and animate every

Christian heart.

To be with Him is to be like Him, and therefore to be conscious of His

presence in some fashion so intimate, so certain, as that all our

earthly notions of presence, derived from the juxtaposition of

corporeal frames, are infinite distance as compared with it. That is

what my text dimly shadows for us. We know not how that union, which is

to be as close as is possible while the distinction of personality is

retained, may be accomplished. But this we know, that the coalescence

of two drops of mercury, the running together of two drops of water,

the blending of heart with heart here in love, are distance in

comparison with the complete union of Christ and of the happy soul that

rests in Him, as in an atmosphere and an ocean. Oh, brethren! it is not

a thing to talk about; it is a thing to take to our hearts, and in

silence to be thankful for; absent from the body; present with the

Lord.'

And is that not enough? The ground of it is enough. If we believe that

Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will

God bring with Him.' That future companionship is guaranteed to the

Christian man by the words of Incarnate Truth, and by the resurrection

of his Lord. The ground of it is enough, and the contents are

enough--enough for faith; enough for hope; enough for peace; enough for

work; and eminently enough for comfort.

Ah! there are many other questions that we would fain ask, but to which

there is no reply; but as the good old rough music of one of the

eighteenth-century worthies has it, we have sufficient.

My knowledge of that life is small,

The eye of faith is dim;

But tis enough that Christ knows all,

And I shall be with Him.'

It is enough for the disciple that he be as' (that is, with) his

Master.' So let us take that thought to our hearts and animate

ourselves with it, for it is legitimate for us to do so. That one hope

is sufficient for us all.

Only let us remember that, according to the teaching of my text, the

companionship that blesses the future is the issue of following Him

now. I know of no magic in death that is able to change the direction

in which a man's face is turned. As he is travelling and has travelled,

so he will travel when he comes through the tunnel, and out into the

brighter light yonder. The line of a railway marked upon a map may stop

at the boundaries of the country with which the map is concerned, but

it is clearly going somewhere, and in the same direction. You want the

other sheet of the map in order to see whither it is going. That is

like your life. The map stops very abruptly, but the line does not

stop. Take an unfinished row of tenements. On the last house there

stick out bricks preparatory to the continuation of the row. And so our

lives are, as it were, studded over with protuberances and preparations

for the attachment thereto of a house not made with hands,' and yet

conformed in its architecture to the row that we have built. The man

that follows will attain. For life, the all-sufficient law is, after

Christ; for hope, the all-sufficient assurance is, with Christ.

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THE UNIVERSAL MAGNET

I, if I be lifted up . . . will draw all men unto Me.'--JOHN xii. 32.

Never man spake like this Man,' said the wondering Temple officials who

were sent to apprehend Jesus. There are many aspects of our Lord's

teaching in which it strikes one as unique; but perhaps none is more

singular than the boundless boldness of His assertions of His

importance to the world. Just think of such sayings as these: I am the

Light of the world'; I am the Bread of Life'; I am the Door'; A greater

than Solomon is here'; In this place is One greater than the Temple.'

We do not usually attach much importance to men's estimate of

themselves; and gigantic claims such as these are generally met by

incredulity or scorn. But the strange thing about Christ's loftiest

assertions of His world-wide worth and personal sinlessness is that

they provoke no contradiction, and that the world takes Him at His own

valuation. So profound is the impression that He has made, that men

assent when He says, I am meek and lowly in heart,' and do not answer

as they would to anybody else, If you were, you would never have said

so.'

Now there is no more startling utterance of this extraordinary

self-consciousness of Jesus Christ than the words that I have used for

my text. They go deep down into the secret of His power. They open a

glimpse into His inmost thoughts about Himself which He very seldom

shows us. And they come to each of us with a very touching and strong

personal appeal as to what we are doing with, and how we individually

are responding to, that universal appeal on which He says that He is

exercising.

I. So I wish to dwell on these words now, and ask you first to notice

here our Lord's forecasting of the Cross.

A handful of Greeks had come up to Jerusalem to the Passover, and they

desired to see Jesus, perhaps only because they had heard about Him,

and to gratify some fleeting curiosity; perhaps for some deeper and

more sacred reason. But in that tiny incident our Lord sees the first

green blade coming up above the ground which was the prophet of an

abundant harvest; the first drop of a great abundance of rain. He

recognises that He is beginning to pass out from Israel into the world.

But the thought of His world-wide influence thus indicated and

prophesied immediately brings along with it the thought of what must be

gone through before that influence can be established. And he discerns

that, like the corn of wheat that falls into the ground, the condition

of fruitfulness for Him is death.

Now we are to remember that our Lord here is within a few hours of

Gethsemane, and a few days of the Cross, and that events had so

unfolded themselves that it needed no prophet to see that there could

only be one end to the duel which he had deliberately brought about

between Himself and the rulers of Israel. So that I build nothing upon

the anticipation of the Cross, which comes out at this stage in our

Lord's history, for any man in His position might have seen, as clearly

as He did, that His path was blocked, and that very near at hand, by

the grim instrument of death. But then remember that this same

expression of my text occurs at a very much earlier period of our

Lord's career, and that if we accept this Gospel of John, at the very

beginning of it He said, As Moses lifted up the serpent in the

wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up'; and that that

was no mere passing thought is obvious from the fact that midway in His

career, if we accept the testimony of the same Gospel, He used the same

expression to cavilling opponents when He said: When ye have lifted up

the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He.' And so at the

beginning, in the middle, and at the end of His career the same idea is

cast into the same words, a witness of the hold that it had upon Him,

and the continual presence of it to His consciousness.

I do not need to refer here to other illustrations and proofs of the

same thing, only I desire to say, as plainly and strongly as I can,

that modern ideas that Jesus Christ only recognised the necessity of

His death at a late stage of His work, and that like other reformers,

He began with buoyant hope, and thought that He had but to speak and

the world would hear, and, like other reformers, was disenchanted by

degrees, are, in my poor judgment, utterly baseless, and bluntly

contradicted by the Gospel narratives. And so, dear brethren, this is

the image that rises before us, and that ought to appeal to us all very

plainly; a Christ who, from the first moment of His consciousness of

Messiahship--and how early that consciousness was I am not here to

inquire--was conscious likewise of the death that was to close it. He

came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,' and likewise for this

end, to give His life a ransom for the many.' That gracious, gentle

life, full of all charities, and long-suffering, and sweet goodness,

and patience, was not the life of a Man whose heart was at leisure from

all anxiety about Himself, but the life of a Man before whom there

stood, ever grim and distinct away on the horizon, the Cross and

Himself upon it. You all remember a well-known picture that suggests

the Shadow of Death,' the shadow of the Cross falling, unseen by Him,

but seen with open eyes of horror by His mother. But the reality is a

far more pathetic one than that; it is this, that He came on purpose to

die.

But now there is another point suggested by these remarkable words, and

that is that our Lord regarded the Cross of shame as exaltation or

lifting up.' I do not believe that the use of this remarkable phrase in

our text finds its explanation in the few inches of elevation above the

surface of the ground to which the crucified victims were usually

raised. That is there, of course, but there is something far deeper and

more wonderful than that in the background, and it is this in part,

that that Cross, to Christ's eyes, bore a double aspect. So far as the

inflicters or the externals of it were concerned, it was ignominy,

shame, agony, the very lowest point of humiliation. But there was

another side to it. What in one aspect is the nadir, the lowest point

beneath men's feet, is in another aspect the zenith, the very highest

point in the bending heaven above us. So throughout this Gospel, and

very emphatically in the text, we find that we have the complement of

the Pauline view of the Cross, which is, that it was shame and agony.

For our Lord says, Now the hour is come when the Son of Man shall be

glorified.' Whether it is glory or shame depends on what it was that

bound Him there. The reason for His enduring it makes it the very

climax and flaming summit of His flaming love. And, therefore, He is

lifted up not merely because the Cross is elevated above the ground on

the little elevation of Calvary, but that Cross is His throne, because

there, in highest and sovereign fashion, are set forth His glories, the

glories of His love, and of the grace and truth' of which He was full.'

So let us not forget this double aspect, and whilst we bow before Him

who endured the Cross, despising the shame,' let us also try to

understand and to feel what He means when, in the vision of it, He

said, the hour is come that the Son of Man shall be glorified.' It was

meant for mockery, but mockery veiled unsuspected truth when they

twined round His pale brows the crown of thorns, thereby setting forth

unconsciously the everlasting truth that sovereignty is won by

suffering; and placed in His unresisting hand the sceptre of reed,

thereby setting forth the deep truth of His kingdom, that dominion is

exercised in gentleness. Mightier than all rods of iron, or sharp

swords which conquerors wield, and more lustrous and splendid than

tiaras of gold glistening with diamonds, are the sceptre of reed in the

hands, and the crown of thorns on the head, of the exalted, because

crucified, Man of Sorrows.

But there is still another aspect of Christ's vision of His Cross, for

the lifting up' on it necessarily draws after it the lifting up to the

dominion of the heavens. And so the Apostle, using a word kindred with

that of my text, but intensifying it by addition, says, He became

obedient even unto the death of the Cross, wherefore God also hath

highly lifted Him up.'

So here we have Christ's own conception of His death, that it was

inevitable, that it was exaltation even in the act of dying, and that

it drew after it, of inevitable necessity, dominion exercised from the

heavens over all the earth. He was lifted up on Calvary, and because He

was lifted up He has carried our manhood into the place of glory, and

sitteth at the right hand of the Majesty on high. So much for the first

point to which I would desire to turn your attention.

II. Now we have here our Lord disclosing the secret of His attractive

power.

I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.' That

if' expresses no doubt, it only sets forth the condition. The Christ

lifted up on the Cross is the Christ that draws men. Now I would have

you notice the fact that our Lord thus unveils, as it were, where His

power to influence individuals and humanity chiefly resides. He speaks

about His death in altogether a different fashion from that of other

men, for He does not merely say, If I be lifted up from the earth, this

story of the Cross will draw men,' but He says, I will' do it; and thus

contemplates, as I shall have to say in a moment, continuous personal

influence all through the ages.

Now that is not how other people have to speak about their deaths, for

all other men who have influenced the world for good or for evil,

thinkers and benefactors, and reformers, social and religious, all of

them come under the one law that their death is no part of their

activity, but terminates their work, and that thereafter, with few

exceptions, and for brief periods, their influence is a diminishing

quantity. So one Apostle had to say, To abide in the flesh is more

needful for you,' and another had to say, I will endeavour that after

my decease ye may keep in mind the things that I have told you'; and

all thinkers and teachers and helpers glide away further and further,

and are wrapped about with thicker and thicker mists of oblivion, and

their influence becomes less and less.

The best that history can say about any of them is, This man, having

served his generation by the will of God, fell on sleep.' But that

other Man who was lifted on the Cross saw no corruption, and the death

which puts a period to all other men's work was planted right in the

centre of His, and was itself part of that work, and was followed by a

new form of it which is to endure for ever.

The Cross is the magnet of Christianity. Jesus Christ draws men, but it

is by His Cross mainly, and that He felt this profoundly is plain

enough, not only from such utterances as this of my text, but, to go no

further, from the fact that He has asked us to remember only one thing

about Him, and has established that ordinance of the Communion or the

Lord's Supper, which is to remind us always, and to bear witness to the

world, of where is the centre of His work, and the fact which He most

desires that men should keep in mind, not the graciousness of His

words, not their wisdom, not the good deeds that He did, but This is My

body broken for you . . . this cup is the New Testament in My blood.' A

religion which has for its chief rite the symbol of a death, must

enshrine that death in the very heart of the forces to which it trusts

to renew the world, and to bless individual souls.

If, then, that is true, if Jesus Christ was not all wrong when He spoke

as He did in my text, then the question arises, what is it about His

death that makes it the magnet that will draw all men? Men are drawn by

cords of love. They may be driven by other means, but they are drawn

only by love. And what is it that makes Christ's death the highest and

noblest and most wonderful and transcendent manifestation of love that

the world has ever seen, or ever can see? No doubt you will think me

very narrow and old-fashioned when I answer the question, with the

profoundest conviction of my own mind, and, I hope, the trust of my own

heart. The one thing that entitles men to interpret Christ's death as

the supreme manifestation of love is that it was a death voluntarily

undertaken for a world's sins.

If you do not believe that, will you tell me what claim on your heart

Christ has because He died? Has Socrates any claim on your heart? And

are there not hundreds and thousands of martyrs who have just as much

right to be regarded with reverence and affection as this Galilean

carpenter's Son has, unless, when He died, He died as the Sacrifice for

the sins of the whole world, and for yours and mine? I know all the

pathetic beauty of the story. I know how many men's hearts are moved in

some degree by the life and death of our Lord, who yet would hesitate

to adopt the full-toned utterance which I have now been giving. But I

would beseech you, dear friends, to lay this question seriously to

heart, whether there is any legitimate reason for the reverence, the

love, the worship, which the world is giving to this Galilean young

man, if you strike out the thought that it was because He loved the

world that He chose to die to loose it from the bands of its sin. It

may be, it is, a most pathetic and lovely story, but it has not power

to draw all men, unless it deals with that which all men need, and

unless it is the self-surrender of the Son of God for the whole world.

III. And now, lastly, we have here our Lord anticipating continuous and

universal influence.

I have already drawn attention to the peculiar fullness of the form of

expression in my text, which, fairly interpreted, does certainly imply

that our Lord at that supreme moment looked forward, as I have already

said, to His death, not as putting a period to His work, but as being

the transition from one form of influence operating upon a very narrow

circle, to another form of influence which would one day flood the

world. I do not need to dwell upon that thought, beyond seeking to

emphasise this truth, that one ought to feel that Jesus Christ has a

living connection now with each of us. It is not merely that the story

of the Cross is left to work its results, but, as I for my part

believe, that the dear Lord, who, before He became Man, was the Light

of the World, and enlightened every man that came into it, after His

death is yet more the Light of the World, and is exercising influence

all over the earth, not only by conscience and the light that is within

us, nor only through the effects of the record of His past, but by the

continuous operations of His Spirit. I do not dwell upon that thought

further than to say that I beseech you to think of Jesus Christ, not as

One who died for our sins only, but as one who lives to-day, and

to-day, in no rhetorical exaggeration but in simple and profound truth,

is ready to help and to bless and to be with every one of us. It is

Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the

right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.'

But, beyond that, mark His confidence of universal influence: I will

draw all men.' I need not dwell upon the distinct adaptation of

Christian truth, and of that sacrifice on the Cross, to the needs of

all men. It is the universal remedy, for it goes direct to the

universal epidemic. The thing that men and women want most, the thing

that you want most, is that your relation with God shall be set right,

and that you shall be delivered from the guilt of past sin, from the

exposure to its power in the present and in the future. Whatever

diversities of climate, civilisation, culture, character the world

holds, every man is like every other man in this, that he has sinned

and come short of the glory of God.' And it is because Christ's Cross

goes direct to deal with that condition of things that the preaching of

it is a gospel, not for this phase of society or that type of men or

the other stage of culture, but that it is meant for, and is able to

deliver and to bless, every man.

So, brethren, a universal attraction is raying out from Christ's Cross,

and from Himself to each of us. But that universal attraction can be

resisted. If a man plants his feet firmly and wide apart, and holds on

with both hands to some staple or holdfast, then the drawing cannot

draw. There is the attraction, but he is not attracted. You demagnetise

Christianity, as all history shows, if you strike out the death on the

Cross for a world's sin. What is left is not a magnet, but a bit of

scrap iron. And you can take yourself away from the influence of the

attraction if you will, some of us by active resistance, some of us by

mere negligence, as a cord cast over some slippery body with the

purpose of drawing it, may slip off, and the thing lie there unmoved.

And so I come to you now, dear friends, with the plain question, What

are you doing in response to Christ's drawing of you? He has died for

you on the Cross; does that not draw? He lives to bless you; does that

not draw? He loves you with love changeless as a God, with love warm

and emotional as a man; does that not draw? He speaks to you, I venture

to say, through my poor words, and says, Come unto Me, and I will give

you rest'; does that not draw? We are all in the bog. He stands on firm

ground, and puts out a hand. If you like to clutch it, by the pledge of

the nail-prints on the palm, He will lift you from the horrible pit and

the miry clay, and set your feet upon a rock.' God grant that all of us

may say, Draw us, and we will run after Thee'!

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THE SON OF MAN

. . . Who is this Son of Man?'--JOHN xii. 34.

I have thought that a useful sermon may be devoted to the consideration

of the remarkable name which our Lord gives to Himself--the Son of

Man.' And I have selected this instance of its occurrence, rather than

any other, because it brings out a point which is too frequently

overlooked, viz. that the name was an entirely strange and enigmatical

one to the people who heard it. This question of utter bewilderment

distinctly shows us that, and negatives, as it seems to me, the

supposition which is often made, that the name Son of Man,' upon the

lips of Jesus Christ, was equivalent to Messiah. Obviously there is no

such significance attached to it by those who put this question. As

obviously, for another reason, the two names do not cover the same

ground; for our Lord sedulously avoided calling Himself the Christ, and

habitually called Himself the Son of Man.

Now one thing to observe about this name is that it is never found upon

the lips of any but Jesus Christ. No man ever called him the Son of Man

whilst He was upon earth, and only once do we find it applied to Him in

the rest of Scripture, and that is on the occasion on which the first

martyr, Stephen, dying at the foot of the old wall, saw the heavens

opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' Two

other apparent instances of the use of the expression occur, both of

them in the Book of Revelation, both of them quotations from the Old

Testament, and in both the more probable reading gives a Son of Man,'

not the Son of Man.'

One more preliminary remark and I will pass to the title itself. The

name has been often supposed to be taken from the remarkable prophecy

in the Book of Daniel, of one like a son of man,' who receives from the

Ancient of Days an everlasting kingdom which triumphs over those

kingdoms of brute force which the prophet had seen. No doubt there is a

connection between the prophecy and our Lord's use of the name, but it

is to be observed that what the prophet speaks of is not the Son,' but

one like a son of man'; or in other words, that what the prophecy

dwells upon is simply the manhood of the future King in

contradistinction to the bestial forms of Lion and Leopard and Bear,

whose kingdoms go down before him. Of course Christ fulfils that

prediction, and is the One like a son of man,' but we cannot say that

the title is derived from the prophecy, in which, strictly speaking, it

does not occur.

What, then, is the force of this name, as applied to Himself by our

Lord?

First, we have in it Christ putting out His hand, if I may say so, to

draw us to Himself--identifying Himself with us. Then we have, just as

distinctly, Christ, by the use of this name, in a very real sense

distinguishing Himself from us, and claiming to hold a unique and

solitary relation to mankind. And then we have Christ, by the use of

this name in its connection with the ancient prophecy, pointing us

onward to a wonderful future.

I. First then, Christ thereby identifies Himself with us.

The name Son of Man, whatever more it means, declares the historical

fact of His Incarnation, and the reality and genuineness, the

completeness and fullness, of His assumption of humanity. And so it is

significant to notice that the name is employed continually in the

places in the Gospels where especial emphasis is to be placed, for some

reason or other, upon our Lord's manhood, as, for instance, when He

would bring into view the depth of His humiliation. It is this name

that He uses when He says: Foxes have holes and the birds of the air

have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.' The use

of the term there is very significant and profound; He contrasts His

homelessness, not with the homes of men that dwell in palaces, but with

the homes of the inferior creatures. As if He would say, Not merely am

I individually homeless and shelterless, but I am so because I am truly

a man, the only creature that builds houses, and the only creature that

has not a home. Foxes have holes, anywhere they can rest, the birds of

the air have,' not as our Bible gives it, nests,' but roosting-places,

any bough will do for them. All living creatures are at home in this

material universe; I, as a Representative of humanity, wander a pilgrim

and a sojourner.' We are all restless and homeless; the creatures

correspond to their environment. We have desires and longings, wild

yearnings, and deep-seated needs, that wander through eternity'; the

Son of Man, the representative of manhood, hath not where to lay His

head.'

Then the same expression is employed on occasions when our Lord desires

to emphasise the completeness of His participation in all our

conditions. As, for instance, the Son of Man came eating and drinking,'

knowing the ordinary limitations and necessities of corporeal humanity;

having the ordinary dependence upon external things; nor unwilling to

taste, with pure and thankful lip, whatever gladness may be found in

man's path through the supply of natural appetites.

And the name is employed habitually on occasions when He desires to

emphasise His manhood as having truly taken upon itself the whole

weight and weariness of man's sin, and the whole burden of man's guilt,

and the whole tragicalness of the penalties thereof, as in the familiar

passages, so numerous that I need only refer to them and need not

attempt to quote them, in which we read of the Son of Man being

betrayed into the hands of sinners'; or in those words, for instance,

which so marvellously blend the lowliness of the Man and the lofty

consciousness of the mysterious relation which He bears to the whole

world; The Son of Man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister,

and to give His life a ransom for the many.'

Now if we gather all these instances together (and they are only

specimens culled almost at random), and meditate for a moment on the

Name as illuminated by such words as these, they suggest to us, first,

how truly and how blessedly He is bone of our bone, and flesh of our

flesh.' All our human joys were His. He knew all human sorrow. The

ordinary wants of human nature belonged to Him; He hungered, He

thirsted, and was weary; He ate and drank and slept. The ordinary wants

of the human heart He knew; He was hurt by hatred, stung by

ingratitude, yearned for love; His spirit expanded amongst friends, and

was pained when they fell away. He fought and toiled, and sorrowed and

enjoyed. He had to pray, to trust, and to weep. He was a Son of Man, a

true man among men. His life was brief; we have but fragmentary records

of it for three short years. In outward form it covers but a narrow

area of human experience, and large tracts of human life seem to be

unrepresented in it. Yet all ages and classes of men, in all

circumstances, however unlike those of the peasant Rabbi who died when

he was just entering mature manhood, may feel that this man comes

closer to them than all beside. Whether for stimulus for duty, or for

grace and patience in sorrow, or for restraint in enjoyment, or for the

hallowing of all circumstances and all tasks, the presence and example

of the Son of Man are sufficient. Wherever we go, we may track His

footsteps by the drops of His blood upon the sharp flints that we have

to tread. In all narrow passes, where the briars tear the wool of the

flock, we may see, left there on the thorns, what they rent from the

pure fleece of the Lamb of God that went before. The Son of Man is our

Brother and our Example.

And is it not beautiful, and does it not speak to us touchingly and

sweetly of our Lord's earnest desire to get very near us and to bring

us very near to Him, that this name, which emphasises humiliation and

weakness and the likeness to ourselves, should be the name that is

always upon His lips? Just as, if I may compare great things with

small, some teacher or philanthropist, that went away from civilised

into savage life, might leave behind him the name by which he was known

in Europe, and adopt some barbarous designation that was significant in

the language of the savage tribe to whom he was sent, and say to them:

That is my name now, call me by that,' so this great Leader of our

souls, who has landed upon our coasts with His hands full of blessings,

His heart full of love, has taken a name that makes Him one of

ourselves, and is never wearied of speaking to our hearts, and telling

us that it is that by which He chooses to be known. It is a touch of

the same infinite condescension which prompted His coming, that makes

Him choose as His favourite and habitual designation the name of

weakness and identification, the name Son of Man.'

II. But now turn to what is equally distinct and clear in this title.

Here we have our Lord distinguishing Himself from us, and plainly

claiming a unique relationship to the whole world.

Just fancy how absurd it would be for one of us to be perpetually

insisting on the fact that he was a man, to be taking that as his

continual description of himself, and pressing it upon people's

attention as if there was something strange about it. The idea is

preposterous; and the very frequency and emphasis with which the name

comes from our Lord's lips, lead one to suspect that there is something

lying behind it more than appears on the surface. That impression is

confirmed and made a conviction, if you mark the article which is

prefixed, the Son of Man. A Son of man is a very different idea. When

He says the Son of Man' He seems to declare that in Himself there are

gathered up all the qualities that constitute humanity; that He is, to

use modern language, the realised Ideal of manhood, the typical Man, in

whom is everything that belongs to manhood, and who stands forth as

complete and perfect. Appropriately, then, the name is continually used

with suggestions of authority and dignity contrasting with those of

humiliation. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath,' The Son of Man

hath power on earth to forgive sins' and the like. So that you cannot

get away from this, that this Man whom the whole world has conspired to

profess to admire for His gentleness, and His meekness, and His

lowliness, and His religious sanity, stood forward and said: I am

complete and perfect, and everything that belongs to manhood you will

find in Me.'

And it is very significant in this connection that the designation

occurs more frequently in the first three Gospels than in the fourth;

which is alleged to present higher notions of the nature and

personality of Jesus Christ than are found in the other three. There

are more instances in Matthew's Gospel in which our Lord calls Himself

the Son of Man, with all the implication of uniqueness and completeness

which that name carries; there are more even in the Gospel of the

Servant, the Gospel according to Mark, than in the Gospel of the Word

of God, the Gospel according to John. And so I think we are entitled to

say that by this name, which the testimony of all our four Gospels

makes it certain, even to the most suspicious reader, that Christ

applied to Himself, He declared His humanity, His absolutely perfect

and complete humanity.

In substance He is claiming the same thing for Himself that Paul

claimed for Him when he called Him the second Adam.' There have been

two men in the world, says Paul, the fallen Adam, with his infantile

and undeveloped perfections, and the Christ, with His full and complete

humanity. All other men are fragments, He is the entire and perfect

chrysolite.' As one of our epigrammatic seventeenth-century divines has

it, Aristotle is but the rubbish of an Adam,' and Adam is but the dim

outline sketch of a Jesus. Between these two there has been none. The

one Man as God meant him, the type of man, the perfect humanity, the

realised ideal, the home of all the powers of manhood, is He who

Himself claimed that place for Himself, and stepped into it with the

strange words upon His lips, I am meek and lowly of heart.'

Who is this Son of Man?' Ah, brethren! who can bring a clean thing out

of an unclean? Not one.' A perfect Son of Man, born of a woman, bone of

our bone and flesh of our flesh,' must be more than a Son of Man. And

that moral completeness and that ideal perfection in all the faculties

and parts of His nature which drove the betrayer to clash down the

thirty pieces of silver in the sanctuary in despair that he had

betrayed innocent blood'; which made Pilate wash his hands of the blood

of this just person'; which stopped the mouths of the adversaries when

He challenged them to convince Him of sin, and which all the world ever

since has recognised and honoured, ought surely to lead us to ask the

question, Who is this Son of Man?' and to answer it, as I pray we all

may answer it, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!'

This fact of His absolute completeness invests His work with an

altogether unique relationship to the rest of mankind. And so we find

the name employed upon His own lips in connections in which He desires

to set Himself forth as the single and solitary medium of all blessing

and salvation to the world--as, for instance, The Son of Man came to

give His life a ransom for the many'; Ye shall see the heavens opened,

and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.' He

is what the ladder was in the vision to the patriarch, with his head

upon the stone and the Syrian sky over him--the Medium of all

communication between earth and heaven. And that ladder which joins

heaven to earth, and brings all angels down on the solitary watchers,

comes straight down, as the sunbeams do, to every man wherever he is.

Each of us sees the shortest line from his own standing-place to the

central light, and its beams come straight to the apple of each man's

eye. So because Christ is more than a man, because He is the Man, His

blessings come to each of us direct and straight, as if they had been

launched from the throne with a purpose and a message to us alone. Thus

He who is in Himself perfect manhood touches all men, and all men touch

Him, and the Son of Man, whom God hath sealed, will give to every one

of us the bread from heaven. The unique relationship which brings Him

into connection with every soul of man upon earth, and makes Him the

Saviour, Helper, and Friend of us all, is expressed when He calls

Himself the Son of Man.

III. And now one last word in regard to the predictive character of

this designation.

Even if we cannot regard it as being actually a quotation of the

prophecy in the Book of Daniel, there is an evident allusion to that

prophecy, and to the whole circle of ideas presented by it, of an

everlasting dominion, which shall destroy all antagonistic power, and

of a solemn coming for judgment of One like a Son of Man.

We find, then, the name occurring on our Lord's lips very frequently in

that class of passages with which we are so familiar, and which are so

numerous that I need not quote them to you; in which He speaks of the

second coming of the Son of Man; as, for instance, that one which

connects itself most distinctly with the Book of Daniel, the words of

high solemn import before the tribunal of the High Priest. Hereafter

shall ye see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and

coming in the glories of heaven'; or as when He says, He hath given Him

authority to execute judgment also because He is the Son of Man'; or as

when the proto-martyr, with his last words, declared in sudden burst of

surprise and thrill of gladness, I see the heavens opened, and the Son

of Man standing at the right hand of God.'

Two thoughts are all that I can touch on here. The name carries with it

a blessed message of the present activity and perpetual manhood of the

risen Lord. Stephen does not see Him as all the rest of Scripture

paints Him, sitting at the right hand of God, but standing there. The

emblem of His sitting at the right hand of God represents triumphant

calmness in the undisturbed confidence of victory. It declares the

completeness of the work that He has done upon earth, and that all the

history of the future is but the unfolding of the consequences of that

work which by His own testimony waa finished when He bowed His head and

died. But the dying martyr sees him standing, as if He had sprung to

His feet in response to the cry of faith from the first of the long

train of sufferers. It is as if the Emperor upon His seat, looking down

upon the arena where the gladiators are contending to the death, could

not sit quiet amongst the flashing axes of the lictors and the purple

curtains of His throne, and see their death-struggles, but must spring

to His feet to help them, or at least bend down with the look and with

the reality of sympathy. So Christ, the Son of Man, bearing His manhood

with Him,

Still bends on earth a Brother's eye,'

and is the ever-present Helper of all struggling souls that put their

trust in Him.

Then as to the other and main thought here in view--the second coming

of that perfect Manhood to be our Judge. It is too solemn a subject for

human lips to say much about. It has been vulgarised, and the power

taken out of it by many well-meant attempts to impress it upon men's

hearts. But that coming is certain. That manhood could not end its

relationship to us with the Cross, nor yet with the slow, solemn,

upward progress which bore Him, pouring down blessings, up into the

same bright cloud that had dwelt between the cherubim and had received

Him into its mysterious recesses at the Transfiguration. That He should

come again is the only possible completion of His work.

That Judge is our Brother. So in the deepest sense we are tried by our

Peer. Man's knowledge at its highest cannot tell the moral desert of

anything that any man does. You may judge action, you may sentence for

breaches of law, you may declare a man clear of any blame for such, but

for any one to read the secrets of another heart is beyond human power;

and if He that is the Judge were only a man there would be wild work,

and many a blunder in the sentences that were given. But when we think

that it is the Son of Man that is our Judge, then we know that the

Omniscience of divinity, that ponders the hearts and reads the motives,

will be all blended with the tenderness and sympathy of humanity; that

we shall be judged by One who knows all our frame, not only with the

knowledge of a Maker, if I may so say, as from outside, but with the

knowledge of a possessor, as from within; that we shall be judged by

One who has fought and conquered in all temptations; and most blessed

of all, that we shall be judged by One with whom we have only to plead

His own work and His own love and His Cross that we may stand acquitted

before His throne.

So, brethren, in that one mighty Name all the past, present, and future

are gathered and blended together. In the past His Cross fills the

retrospect: for the future there rises up, white and solemn, His

judgment throne. The Son of Man is come to give His life a ransom for

the many'; that is the centre point of all history. The Son of Man

shall come to judge the world; that is the one thought that fills the

future. Let us lay hold by true faith on the mighty work which He has

done on the Cross, then we shall rejoice to see our Brother on the

throne, when the judgment is set and the books are opened.' Oh,

friends, cleave to Him ever in trust and love, in communion and

imitation, in obedience and confession, that ye may be accounted worthy

to stand before the Son of Man' in that day!

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A PARTING WARNING

Jesus therefore said unto them, Yet a little while is the light among

you. Walk while ye have the light, that darkness overtake you not: and

he that walketh in the darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye

have the light, believe on the light, that ye may become sons of

light.'--JOHN xii. 35, 36 (R.V.).

These are the last words of our Lord's public ministry. He afterwards

spoke only to His followers in the sweet seclusion of the sympathetic

home at Bethany, and amid the sanctities of the upper chamber. Yet a

little while am I with you'; --the sun had all but set. Two days more,

and the Cross was reared on Calvary, but there was yet time to turn to

the light. And so His divine charity hoped all things,' and continued

to plead with those who had so long rejected Him. As befits a last

appeal, the words unveil the heart of Christ. They are solemn with

warning, radiant with promise, almost beseeching in their earnestness.

He loves too well not to warn, but He will not leave the bitterness of

threatening as a last savour on the palate, and so the lips, into which

grace is poured, bade farewell to His enemies with the promise and the

hope that even they may become the sons of light.'

The solemnity of the occasion, then, gives great force to the words;

and the remembrance of it sets us on the right track for estimating

their significance. Let us see what lessons for us there may be in

Christ's last words to the world.

I. There is, first, a self-revelation.

It is no mere grammatical pedantry that draws attention to the fact

that four times in this text does our Lord employ the definite article,

and speak of the light.' And that that is no mere accident is obvious

from the fact that, in the last clause of our text, where the general

idea of light is all that is meant to be emphatic, the article is

omitted. Yet a little while is the light with you; walk while ye have

the light . . . . While ye have the light, believe in the light, that

ye may be the children of light.'

So then, most distinctly here, in His final appeal to the world, He

draws back the curtain, as it were, takes away the shade that had

covered the lamp, and lets one full beam stream out for the last

impression that He leaves. Is it not profoundly significant and

impressive that then, of all times, over and over again, in the compass

of these short verses, this Galilean peasant makes the tremendous

assertion that He is what none other can be, in a solitary and

transcendent sense, the Light of Mankind? Undismayed by universal

rejection, unfaltering in spite of the curling lips of incredulity and

scorn, unbroken by the near approach of certain martyrdom, He presents

Himself before the world as its Light. Nothing in the history of mad,

fanatical claims to inspiration and divine authority is to be compared

with these assertions of our Lord. He is the fontal Source, He says, of

all illumination; He stands before the whole race, and claims to be the

Master-Light of all our seeing.' Whatsoever ideas of clearness of

knowledge, of rapture of joy, of whiteness of purity, are symbolised by

that great emblem, He declares that He manifests them all to men.

Others may shine; but they are, as He said, lights kindled,' and

therefore burning.' Others may shine, but they have caught their

radiance from Him. All teachers, all helpers, all thinkers draw their

inspiration, if they have any, from Him, in whom was life, and the Life

was the Light of men.

There has been blazing in the heavens of late a new star, that burst

upon astonished astronomers in a void spot; but its brilliancy, though

far transcending that of our sun, soon began to wane, and before long,

apparently, there will be blackness again where there was blackness

before. So all lights but His are temporary as well as derived, and men

willing for a season to rejoice' in the fleeting splendours, and to

listen to the teacher of a day, lose the illumination of his presence

and guidance of his thoughts as the ages roll on. But the Light is not

for an age, but for all time.'

Now, brethren, this is Christ's estimate of Himself. I dwell not on it

for the purpose of seeking to exhaust its depth of significance. In it

there lies the assertion that He, and He only, is the source of all

valid knowledge of the deepest sort concerning God and men, and their

mutual relations. In it lie the assertion that He, and He only, is the

source of all true gladness that may blend with our else darkened

lives, and the further assertion that from Him, and from Him alone, can

flow to us the purity that shall make us pure. We have to turn to that

Man close by His Cross, on whom while He spoke the penumbra of the

eclipse of death was beginning to show itself, and to say to Him what

the Psalmist said of old to the Jehovah whom he knew, and whom we

recognise as indwelling in Jesus: With Thee is the fountain of life.

Thou makest us to drink of the river of Thy pleasures. In Thy light

shall we see light.'

So Christ thought of Himself; so Christ would have as to think of Him.

And it becomes a question for us how, if we refuse to accept that claim

of a solitary, underived, eternal, and universal power of illuminating

mankind, we can save His character for the veneration of the world. We

cannot go picking and choosing amongst the Master's words, and say This

is historical, and that mythical.' We cannot select some of them, and

leave others on one side. You must take the whole Christ if you take

any Christ. And the whole Christ is He who, within sight of Calvary,

and in the face of all but universal rejection, lifted up His voice,

and, as His valediction to the world, declared, I am the Light of the

world.' So He says to us. Oh that we all might cast ourselves before

Him, with the cry, Lighten our darkness, O Lord, we beseech Thee!'

II. Secondly, we have here a double exhortation.

Walk in the light; believe in the light.' These two sum up all our

duties; or rather, unveil for us the whole fullness of the possible

privileges and blessings of which our relation to that light is

capable. It is obvious that the latter of them is the deeper in idea,

and the prior in order of sequence. There must be the belief' in the

light before there is the walk' in the light. Walking includes the

ideas of external activity and of progress. And so, putting these two

exhortations together, we get the whole of Christianity considered as

subjective. Believe in the light; trust in the light,' and then walk'

in it. A word, then, about each of these branches of this double

exhortation.

Trust in the light.' The figure seems to be dropped at first sight; for

it wants little faith to believe in the sunshine at midday; and when

the light is pouring out, how can a man but see it? But the apparent

incongruity of the metaphor points to something very deep in regard to

the spiritual side. We cannot but believe in the light that meets the

eye when it meets it, but it is possible for a man to blind himself to

the shining of this light. Therefore the exhortation is needed--Believe

in the light,' for only by believing it can you see it. Just as the eye

is the organ of sight, just as its nerves are sensitive to the

mysterious finger of the beam, just as on its mirroring surface

impinges the gentle but mighty force that has winged its way across all

the space between us and the sun, and yet falls without hurting, so

faith, the inward eye which makes the bliss' of the solitary soul, is

the one organ by which you and I can see the light. Seeing is

believing,' says the old proverb. That is true in regard to the

physical. Believing is seeing, is much rather the way to put it in

regard to the spiritual and divine.

Only as we trust the light do we see the light. Unless you and I put

our confidence in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, we have

no adequate knowledge of Him and no clear vision of Him. We must know

that we may love; but we must love that we may know. We must believe

that we may see. True, we must see that we may believe, but the

preliminary vision which precedes belief is slight and dim as compared

with the solidity and the depth of assurance with which we apprehend

the reality and know the lustre of Him whom our faith has grasped. You

will never know the glory of the light, nor the sweetness with which it

falls upon the gazing eye, until you turn your face to that Master, and

so receive on your susceptible and waiting heart the warmth and the

radiance which He only can bestow. Believe in the light.' Trust it; or

rather, trust Him who is it. He cannot deceive. This light from heaven

can never lead astray. Absolutely we may rely upon it; unconditionally

we must follow it. Lean upon Him--to take another metaphor--with all

your weight. His arm is strong to bear the burden of our weaknesses,

sorrows, and, above all, our sins. While ye have light, trust the

light.'

But then that is not enough. Man, with his double relations, must have

an active and external as well as an inward and contemplative life. And

so our Lord, side by side with the exhortation on which I have been

touching, puts the other one, Walk in the light.' Our inward emotions,

however deep and precious, however real the affiance, however

whole-hearted the love, are maimed and stunted, and not what the light

requires, unless there follows upon them the activity of the walk. What

do we get the daylight for? To sit and gaze at it? By no means; but

that it may guide us upon our path and help us in all our work. And so

all Christian people need ever to remember that Jesus Christ has

indissolubly bound together these two phases of our relation to Him as

the light of life-inward and blessed contemplation by faith and outward

practical activity. To walk is, of course, the familiar metaphor for

the external life of man, and all our deeds are to be in conformity

with the Light, and in communion with Him. This is the deepest

designation, perhaps, of the true character of a Christian life in its

external aspect--that it walks in Christ, doing nothing but as His

light shines, and ever bearing along with it conscious fellowship with

Him who is thus the guiding and irradiating and gladdening and

sanctifying life of our lives, Walk in the light as He is in the

light.' Our days fleet and change; His are stable and the same. For,

although these words which I have quoted, in their original application

refer to God the Father, they are no less true about Him who rests at

the right hand of God, and is one light with Him. He is in the light.

We may approximate to that stable and calm radiance, even though our

lives are passed through changing scenes, and effort and struggle are

their characteristics. And oh! how blessed, brother, such a life will

be, all gladdened by the unsetting and unclouded sunshine that even in

the shadiest places shines, and turns the darkness of the valley of the

shadow of death into solemn light; teaching gloom to glow with a hidden

sun!

But there is not only the idea of activity here, there is the further

notion of progress. Unless Christian people to their faith add work,

and have both their faith and their consequent work in a continual

condition of progress and growth, there is little reason to believe

that they apprehend the light at all. If you trust the light you will

walk in it; and if your days are not in conformity nor in communion

with Him, and are not advancing nearer and nearer to the central blaze,

then it becomes you to ask yourselves whether you have verily seen at

all, or trusted at all, the Light of life.'

III. Thirdly, there is here a warning.

Walk whilst ye have the light, lest the darkness come upon you.' That

is the summing up of the whole history of that stiff-necked and

marvellous people. For what has all the history of Israel been since

that day but groping in the wilderness without any pillar of fire? But

there is more than that in it. Christ gives us this one solemn warning

of what falls on us if we turn away from Him. Rejected light is the

parent of the densest darkness, and the man who, having the light, does

not trust it, piles around himself thick clouds of obscurity and gloom,

far more doleful and impenetrable than the twilight that glimmers round

the men who have never known the daylight of revelation. The history of

un-Christian and anti-Christian Christendom is a terrible commentary

upon these words of the Master, and the cries that we hear all round us

to-day from men who will not follow the light of Christ, and moan or

boast that they dwell in agnostic darkness, tell us that, of all the

eclipses that can fall upon heart and mind, there is none so dismal or

thunderously dark as that of the men who, having seen the light of

Christ in the sky, have turned from it and said, It is no light, it is

only a mock sun.' Brethren, tempt not that fate.

And if Christian men and women do not advance in their knowledge and

their conformity, like clouds of darkness will fall upon them. None is

so hopeless as the unprogressive Christian, none so far away as those

who have been brought nigh and have never come any nigher. If you

believe the light, see that you growingly trust and walk in it, else

darkness will come upon you, and you will not know whither you go.

IV. And lastly, there is here a hope and a promise.

That ye may be the sons of light.'

Faith and obedience turn a man into the likeness of that in which he

trusts. If we trust Jesus we open our hearts to Him; and if we open our

hearts to Him He will come in. If you are in a darkened room, what have

you to do in order to have it filled with glad sunshine? Open the

shutters and pull up the blinds, and the light will do all the rest. If

you trust the light, it will rush in and fill every crevice and cranny

of your hearts. Faith and obedience will mould us, by their natural

effect, into the resemblance of that on which we lean. As one of the

old German mystics said, What thou lovest, that thou dost become.' And

it is blessedly true. The same principle makes Christians like Christ,

and makes idolaters like their gods. They that make them are like unto

them; so is every one that trusteth in them,' says one of the Psalms.

They followed after vanity and are become vain,' says the chronicler of

Israel's defections. We with unveiled faces beholding'--or

mirroring--the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image.'

Trust the light and you become sons of the light.'

And so, dear friends, all of us may hope that by degrees, as the reward

of faith and of walking, we still may bear the image of the heavenly,

even here on earth. While as yet we only believe in the light, we may

participate in its transforming power, like some far-off planet on the

utmost bounds of some solar system, that receives faint and small

supplies of light and warmth, through a thick atmosphere of vapour, and

across immeasurable spaces. But we have the assurance that we shall be

carried nearer our centre, and then, like the planets that are closer

to the sun than our earth is, we shall feel the fuller power of the

heat, and be saturated with the glory of the light. We shall see Him as

He is'; and then we too shall blaze forth like the sun in the kingdom

of our Father.'

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THE LOVE OF THE DEPARTING CHRIST

. . . When Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out

of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the

world, He loved them unto the end.'--JOHN xiii. 1.

The latter half of St. John's Gospel, which begins with these words, is

the Holy of Holies of the New Testament. Nowhere else do the blended

lights of our Lord's superhuman dignity and human tenderness shine with

such lambent brightness. Nowhere else is His speech at once so simple

and so deep. Nowhere else have we the heart of God so unveiled to us.

On no other page, even of the Bible, have so many eyes, glistening with

tears, looked and had the tears dried. The immortal words which Christ

spoke in that upper chamber are His highest self-revelation in speech,

even as the Cross to which they led up is His most perfect

self-revelation in act.

To this most sacred part of the New Testament my text is the

introduction. It unveils to us gleams of Christ's heart, and does what

the Evangelists very seldom venture to do, viz. gives us some sort of

analysis of the influences which then determined the flow and the shape

of our Lord's love.

Many good commentators prefer to read the last words of my text, He

loved them unto the uttermost' rather than unto the end'--so taking

them to express the depth and degree rather than the permanence and

perpetuity of our Lord's love. And that seems to me to be by far the

worthier and the nobler meaning, as well as the one which is borne out

by the usual signification of the expression in other Greek authors. It

is much to know that the emotions of these last moments did not

interrupt Christ's love. It is even more to know that in some sense

they perfected it, giving even a greater vitality to its tenderness,

and a more precious sweetness to its manifestations. So understood, the

words explain for us why it was that in the sanctity of the upper

chamber there ensued the marvellous act of the foot-washing, the

marvellous discourses which follow, and the climax of all, that

High-priestly prayer. They give utterance to a love which Christ's

consciousness at that solemn hour tended to shapen and to deepen.

So, under the Evangelist's guidance, we may venture to gaze at least a

little way into these depths, and with all reverence to try and see

something at all events of the fringe and surface of the love which

passeth knowledge.' Jesus, knowing that His hour was come, that He

should depart out of the world unto the Father, having loved His own

which were in the world, loved them then unto the uttermost.'

My object will be best accomplished by simply following the guidance of

the words before us, and asking you to look first at that love as a

love which was not interrupted, but perfected by the prospect of

separation.

I. It would take us much too far away, however interesting the

contemplation might be, to dwell with any particularity upon our Lord's

consciousness as it is here set forth in that He knew that His hour was

come, that He should depart out of the world unto the Father.' But I

can scarcely avoid noticing, though only in a few sentences, the

salient points of that Christ-consciousness as it is set forth here.

He knew that His hour was come.' All His life was passed under the

consciousness of a divine necessity laid upon Him, to which He lovingly

and cheerfully yielded Himself. On His lips there are no words more

significant, and few more frequent, than that divine I must!' It

behoves the Son of Man' to do this, that, and the other--yielding to

the necessity imposed by the Father's will, and sealed by His own

loving resolve to be the Saviour of the world. And in like manner, all

through His life He declares Himself conscious of the hours which mark

the several crises and stages of His mission. They come to Him and He

discerns them. No external power can coerce Him to any act till the

hour come. No external power can hinder Him from the act when it comes.

When the hour strikes He hears the phantom sound of the bell; and,

hearing, He obeys. And thus, at the last and supreme moment, to Him it

dawned unquestionable and irrevocable. How did He meet it? Whilst on

the one hand there was the shrinking of which we have such pathetic

testimony in the broken prayer that He Himself amended--Father! save Me

from this hour . . . . Yet for this cause came I unto this

hour,'--there is a strange, triumphant joy, blending with the

shrinking, that the decisive hour is at last come.

Mark, too, the form which the consciousness took--not that now the hour

had come for suffering or death or bearing the sins of the world--all

which aspects of it were nevertheless present to Him, as we know; but

that now He was soon to leave all the world beneath Him and to return

to the Father.

The terror, the agony, the shame, the mysterious burden of a world's

sins were now to be laid upon Him--all these elements are submerged, as

it were, and become less conspicuous than the one thought of leaving

behind all the limitations, and the humiliations, and the compelled

association with evil which, like a burning brand laid upon a tender

skin, was an hourly and momentary agony to Him, and soaring above them

all, unto His own calm home, His habitation from eternity with the

Father, as He had been before the world was. How strange this blending

of shrinking and of eagerness, of sorrow and of joy, of human trembling

consciousness of impending death, and of triumphant consciousness of

the approach of the hour when the Son of Man, even in His bitterest

agony and deepest humiliation, should, paradoxically, be glorified, and

should leave the world to go unto the Father'!

We cannot enter with any particularity or depth into this marvellous

and unique consciousness, but it is set forth here--and that is the

point to which especially I desire to turn your attention--as the basis

and the reason for a special tenderness softening His voice, and taking

possession of His heart, as He thought of the impending separation.

And is that not beautiful? And does it not help us to realise how truly

bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh,' and bearing a heart thrilling

with all innocent human emotions that divine Saviour was? We, too, have

known what it is to feel, because of approaching separation from dear

ones, the need for a tenderer tenderness. At such moments the masks of

use and wont drop away, and we are eager to find some word, to put our

whole souls into some look, our whole strength into one clinging

embrace that may express all our love, and may be a joy to two hearts

for ever after to remember. The Master knew that longing, and felt the

pain of separation; and He, too, yielded to the human impulse which

makes the thought of parting the key to unlock the hidden chambers of

the most jealously guarded heart, and let the shyest of its emotions

come out for once into the daylight. So, knowing that His hour was

come, He loved them unto the uttermost.'

But there is not only in this a wonderful expression of the true

humanity of the Christ, but along with that a suggestion of something

more sacred and deeper still. For surely amidst all the parting scenes

that the world's literature has enshrined, amidst all the examples of

self-oblivion at the last moment, when a martyr has been the comforter

of his weeping friends, there are none that without degradation to this

can be set by the side of this supreme and unique instance of

self-oblivion. Did not Christ, for the sake of that handful of poor

people, first and directly, and for the rest of us afterwards, of

course, secondarily and indirectly, so suppress all the natural

emotions of these last moments as that their absolute absence is unique

and singular, and points onwards to something more, viz. that this Man

who was susceptible of all human affections, and loved us with a love

which is not merely high above our grasp, absolute, perfect, changeless

and divine, but with a love like our own human affection, had also more

than a man's heart to give us, and gave us more, when, that He might

comfort and sustain, He crushed down Himself and went to the Cross with

words of tenderness and consolation and encouragement for others upon

His lips? Knowing all that was lying before Him, He was neither

absorbed nor confounded, but carried a heart at leisure to love even

then unto the uttermost.'

And if the prospect only sharpened and perfected, nor interrupted for

one instant the flow of His love, the reality has no power to do aught

else. In the glory, when He reached it, He poured out the same loving

heart; and to-day He looks down upon us with the same Face that bent

over the table in the upper room, and the same tenderness flows to us.

When John saw his Master next, after His Ascension, amidst the glories

of the vision in his rocky Patmos, though His face was as the sun

shineth in his strength, it was the old face. Though His hand bore the

stars in a cluster, it was the hand that had been pierced with the

nails. Though the breast was girded with the golden girdle of

sovereignty and of priesthood, it was the breast on which John's happy

head had lain; and though the Voice was as the sound of many waters,'

it soothed itself to a murmur, gentle as that with which the tideless

sea about him rippled upon the silvery sand when He said, Fear not

. . . I am the First and the Last.' Knowing that He goes to the Father,

He loves to the uttermost, and being with the Father, He still so

loves.

II. And now I must, with somewhat less of detail, dwell upon the other

points which this text brings out for us. It suggests to us next that

we have in the love of Jesus Christ a love which is faithful to the

obligations of its own past.

Having loved, He loves. Because He had been a certain thing, therefore

He is and He shall be that same. That is an argument that implies

divinity. About nothing human can we say that because it has been

therefore it shall be. Alas! about much that is human we have to say

the converse, that because it has been, therefore it will cease to be.

And though, blessed be God! they are few and they are poor who have had

no experience in their lives of human hearts whose love in the past has

been such that it manifestly is for ever, yet we cannot with the same

absolute confidence say about one another, even about the dearest,

Having loved, he loves.' But we can say so about Christ. There is no

exhaustion in that great stream that pours out from His heart; no

diminution in its flow.

They tell us that the central light of our system, that great sun

itself, pouring out its rays exhausts its warmth, and were it not

continually replenished, must gradually, and even though continually

replenished, will ultimately cease to blaze, and be a dead, cold mass

of ashes. But this central Light, this heart of Christ, which is the

Sun of the World, will endure like the sun, and after the sun is cold,

His love will last for ever. He pours it out and has none the less to

give. There is no bankruptcy in His expenditure, no exhaustion in His

effort, no diminution in His stores. Thy mercy endureth for ever'; Thou

hast loved, therefore Thou wilt love' is an inference for time and for

eternity, on which we may build and rest secure.

III. Then, still further, we have here this love suggested as being a

love which has special tenderness towards its own. Having loved His

own, He loved them to the uttermost.'

These poor men who, with all their errors, did cleave to Him; who, in

some dim way, understood somewhat of His greatness and His

sweetness--and do you and I do more?--who, with all their sins, yet

were true to Him in the main; who had surrendered very much to follow

Him, and had identified themselves with Him, were they to have no

special place in His heart because in that heart the whole world lay?

Is there any reason why we should be afraid of saying that the

universal love of Jesus Christ, which gathers into His bosom all

mankind, does fall with special tenderness and sweetness upon those who

have made Him theirs and have surrendered themselves to be His? Surely

it must be that He has special nearness to those who love Him; surely

it is reasonable that He should have special delight in those who try

to resemble Him; surely it is only what one might expect of Him that He

should in a special manner honour the drafts, so to speak, of those who

have confidence in Him, and are building their whole lives upon Him.

Surely, because the sun shines down upon dunghills and all impurities,

that is no reason why it should not lie with special brightness on the

polished mirror that reflects its lustre. Surely, because Jesus Christ

loves--Blessed be His name!--the publicans and the harlots and the

outcasts and the sinners, that is no reason why He should not bend with

special tenderness over those who, loving Him, try to serve Him, and

have set their whole hopes upon Him. The rainbow strides across the

sky, but there is a rainbow in every little dewdrop that hangs

glistening on the blades of grass. There is nothing limited, nothing

sectional, nothing narrow in the proclamation of a special tenderness

of Christ towards His own, when you accompany with that truth this

other, that all men are besought by Him to come into that circle of His

own,' and that only they themselves shut any out therefrom. Blessed be

His name! the whole world dwells in His love, but there is an inner

chamber in which He discovers all His heart to those who find in that

heart their Heaven and their all. He came to His own,' in the wider

sense of the word, and His own received Him not'; but also, having

loved His own He loved them unto the end.' There are textures and lives

which can only absorb some of the rays of light in the spectrum; some

that are only capable of taking, so to speak, the violet rays of

judgment and of wrath, and some who open their hearts for the ruddy

brightness at the other end of the line. Do you see to it, brethren,

that you are of that inner circle who receive the whole Christ into

their hearts, and to whom He can unfold the fullness of His love.

IV. And, lastly, my text suggests that love of Christ as being made

specially tender by the necessities and the dangers of His friends. He

loved His own which were in the world,' and so loving them, loved them

to the uttermost.'

We have, running through these precious discourses which follow my

text, many allusions to the separation which was to ensue, and to His

leaving His followers in circumstances of peculiar peril, defenceless

and solitary. I come unto Thee, and am no more in the world,' says He

in the final High-priestly prayer, but these are in the world. Holy

Father, keep them through Thine own name.' The same contrast between

the certain security of the Shepherd and the troubled perils of the

scattered flock seems to be in the words of my text, and suggests a

sweet and blessed reason for the special tenderness with which He

looked upon them. As a dying father on his deathbed may yearn over

orphans that he is leaving defenceless, so Christ is here represented

as conscious of an accession even to the tender longings of His heart,

when He thought of the loneliness and the dangers to which His

followers were to be exposed.

Ah! It seems a harsh contrast between the Emperor, sitting throned

there between the purple curtains, and the poor athletes wrestling in

the arena below. It seems strange to think that a loving Master has

gone up into the mountain, and has left His disciples to toil in rowing

on the stormy sea of life; but the contrast is only apparent. For you

and I, if we love and trust Him, are with Him in the heavenly places'

even whilst we toil here, and He is with us, working with us, even

whilst He sitteth at the right hand of God.'

We may be sure of this, brethren, that that love ever increases its

manifestations according to our deepening necessities. The darker the

night the more lustrous the stars. The deeper, the narrower, the

savager, the Alpine gorge, usually the fuller and the swifter the

stream that runs through it. And the more that enemies and fears gather

round about us, the sweeter will be the accents of our Comforter's

voice, and the fuller will be the gifts of tenderness and grace with

which He draws near to us. Our sorrows, dangers, necessities, are doors

through which His love can come nigh.

So, dear friends, we have had experience of sweet and transient human

love; we have had experience of changeful and ineffectual love; turn

away from them all to this immortal, deep heart of Christ's, welling

over with a love which no change can affect, which no separation can

diminish, which no sin can provoke, which becomes greater and tenderer

as our necessities increase, and ask Him to fill your hearts with that,

that you may know the length and breadth and depth and height of that

love which passeth knowledge,' and so be filled with all the fullness

of God.'

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THE SERVANT-MASTER

Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and

that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and

laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After

that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples'

feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.'--JOHN

xiii. 3-5.

It has been suggested that the dispute as to which was the greatest,'

which broke the sanctities of the upper chamber, was connected with the

unwillingness of each of the Apostles to perform the menial office of

washing the feet of his companions. They had come in from Bethany, and

needed the service. But apparently it was omitted, and although we can

scarcely suppose that the transcendent act which is recorded in my text

was performed at the beginning of the meal, yet I think we shall not be

wrong if we see in it a reference to the neglected service.

The Evangelist who tells us of the dispute, and does not tell us of the

foot-washing, preserves a sentence which finds its true meaning only in

this incident, I am among you as He that serveth.' And although John is

the only recorder of this pathetic incident, there are allusions in

other parts of Scripture which seem to hint at it. As, for instance,

when Paul speaks of taking upon Him the form of a servant'; and still

more strikingly when Peter employs the remarkable word, which he does

employ in his exhortation, Be ye clothed with humility.' For the word

rendered there clothed' occurs only in that one place in Scripture, and

means literally the putting on of a slave's costume. One can scarcely

help, then, seeing in these three passages to which I have referred

echoes of this incident which John alone preserves to us. And so we get

at once a hint of the harmony and of the incompleteness of the Gospel

records.

I. Consider the motives of this act.

Now that is ground upon which the Evangelists very seldom enter. They

tell us what Christ did, but very rarely do they give us any glimpses

into why He did it. But this section of the Gospel is remarkable for

its full and careful analysis of what Christ's impelling motives were

in the final acts of His life. How did John find out why Christ did

this deed? Perhaps he who had leaned upon His bosom at supper,' and was

evidently very closely associated with Him, may, in some unrecorded

hour of intimate communion during the forty days between the

Resurrection and the Ascension, have heard from the Master the

exposition of His motives. But more probably, I think, the long years

of growing likeness to his Lord, and of meditation upon the depth of

meaning in the smallest events that his faithful memory recalled,

taught him to understand Christ's purpose and motives. The secret of

the Lord is with them that fear Him,' and the liker we get to our

Master and the more we are filled with His Spirit, the more easy will

it be for us to divine the purpose and the motives of His actions,

whether as they are recorded in the Scripture or as they come to us in

the experience of daily life.

But, passing that point, I desire for a moment to fix your attention on

the twofold key to our Lord's action which is given in this context.

There is, first of all, in the first verse of the chapter, a general

exposition of what was uppermost in His mind and heart during the whole

of the period in the upper room. The act in our text, and the wonderful

words which follow in the subsequent chapters, crowned by that great

intercessory prayer, seem to me to be all explained for us by this

first unveiling of His motives. When Jesus knew that His hour was come

that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved

His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.'

And then the words of my text, which apply more specifically to the

single incident with which they are brought into connection, tell us in

addition why this one manifestation of Christ's love was given. Knowing

that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was

come from God, and went to God.' There, then, are two explanations of

motive, the one covering a wider area than the other, but both

converging on the incident before us.

The first of these is just this--the consciousness of impending

separation moved Christ to a more than ordinarily tender manifestation

of His love. For the rendering which you will find in the margin of the

Revised Version, He loved them to the uttermost,' seems to me to be

truer to the Evangelist's meaning than the other, He loved them unto

the end.' For it was more to John's purpose to tell us that the shadow

of the Cross only brought to the surface in more blessed and wonderful

representation the deep love of His heart, than simply to tell us that

that shadow did not stop its flow. It is much to know that all through

His sorrow He continued to love; it is far more to know that the sorrow

sharpened its poignancy, and deepened its depth, and made more tender

its tenderness.

How near to the man Christ that thought brings us! Do we not all know

the impulse to make parting moments tender moments? The masks of use

and wont drop off; the reticence which we, perhaps wisely, ordinarily

cultivate in regard to our deepest feelings melts away. We yearn to

condense all our unspoken love into some one word, act, look, or

embrace, which it may afterwards be life to two hearts to remember. And

Jesus Christ felt this. Because He was going away He could not but pour

out Himself yet more completely than in the ordinary tenor of His life.

The earthquake lays bare hidden veins of gold, and the heart opens

itself out when separation impends. We shall never understand the works

of Jesus Christ if we do as we are all apt to do, think of them as

having only a didactic and doctrinal purpose. We must remember that

there is in Him the true play of a human heart, and that it was to

relieve His own love, as well as to teach these men their duty, that he

rose from the supper, and prepared Himself to wash the disciples' feet.

Then, on the other hand, the other motive which is brought by the

Evangelists more immediately into connection with this incident is,

knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that

He was come from God, and went to God.'

The consciousness of the highest dignity impels to the lowliest

submission. All things given into His hands,' means universal and

absolute dominion. That He was come from God,' means pre-existence,

voluntary incarnation, an eternal divine nature, and unbroken communion

with the Father. That He went to God,' means a voluntary departure from

this low world, and a return to His own calm home, His habitation from

eternity.'

And, gathered all together, the phrases imply His absolute

consciousness of His divine nature. It was that that sent Him with the

towel round His loins to wash the foul feet of the pedestrians who had

come by the dusty and hot way from Bethany, and through all the

abominations of an Eastern city, into the upper chamber.

This was He who from the beginning was with God, and was God.' This was

He who was the Lord of Death, Victor over the grave. This was He who by

His own power ascended up on high, and reigns on the throne of the

universe to-day. This was He whose breast the same Evangelist had seen

before he wrote his Gospel, girded with the golden girdle' of

priesthood and of sovereignty; and holding, in the hands that had laid

the towel on the disciples' feet, the seven stars.

Oh, brethren! if we believed our creeds, how our hearts would melt with

wonder and awe that He who was so high stooped so low! Knowing that He

came from God, and went to God,' and that even when He was kneeling

there before these men, the Father had given all things into His

hands,' what did He do? Triumph? Show His majesty? Flash His power?

Demand service? Girded Himself with a towel and washed His disciples'

feet'!

The consciousness of loftiness does not alone avail to explain the

transcendent lowliness. You need the former motive to be joined with

it, because it is only love which bends loftiness to service, and turns

the consciousness of superiority into yearning to divest oneself of the

superiorities that separate, and to emphasise the emotions which unite.

II. The detailed completeness of the act.

The remarkable particularity of the account of the stages of the

humiliation suggests the eye-witness. John carried them all in his mind

ineffaceably, and long, long years after that memorable hour we hear

him recalling each detail of the scene. We can see the little group

startled by the disturbance of the order of the meal as He rose from

the table, and the hushed wonder and the open-lipped expectation with

which they watched to see what the next step would be. He rises from

the table and divests Himself of the upper garments which impeded

movement. What will He do next?' He takes the basin, standing there to

be ready for washing the apostles' feet, but unused, and not even

filled with water. He fills it Himself, asking none to help Him. He

girds the towel round Him; and then, perhaps, begins with the betrayer;

at any rate, not with Peter.

Cannot you see them, as they look? Do not you feel the solemnity of the

detailed particular account of each step?

And may we not also say that all is a parable, or illustration, on a

lower level, of the very same principles which were at work in the

mightier fact of the greater condescension of His becoming flesh and

dwelling among us'? He rose from the table,' as He rose from His place

in the bosom of the Father.' He disturbed the meal as He broke the

festivities of the heavens. He divested Himself of His garments, as He

thought not equality with God a thing to be worn eagerly'; and He

girded Himself with the towel,' as He put on the weakness of flesh.

Himself He filled the basin, by His own work providing the means of

cleansing; and Himself applied the cleansing to the feet of those who

were with Him. It is all a working out of the same double motive which

drew Him downwards to our earth. The reason why He stooped, with His

hands to wash the disciples' feet, is the same as the reason why He had

hands to wash with--viz., that knowing Himself to be high over all, and

loving all, He chose to become one with us, that we might become like

unto Him. So the details of the act are a parable of His incarnation

and death.

III. And then, still further, note the purpose of the deed.

Now although I have said that we never rightly understand our Lord's

actions if we are always looking for dogmatic or doctrinal purposes,

and thinking of them rather as being lectures, and sometimes rebukes in

act, than as being the outgush of His emotions and His human-divine

nature, yet we have also to take into account their moral and spiritual

lessons. His acts are words and His words are acts. And although the

main and primary purpose of this incident, in so far as it had any

other purpose than to relieve Christ's own love by manifesting itself,

and to comfort the disciples' hearts by the tender manifestation, was

to teach them their duty, as we shall presently see, yet the special

aspect of cleansing, which comes out so emphatically and prominently in

the episode of Peter's refusal, is to be carried all along through the

interpretation of the incident. This was the reason why Jesus Christ

came from heaven and assumed flesh, and this was the reason why Jesus

Christ, assuming flesh, bowed Himself to this menial office--to make

men clean.

I venture to say that we never understand Jesus Christ and His work

until we recognise this as its prominent purpose, to cleanse us from

sin. An inadequate conception of what we need, shallow, superficial

views of the gravity and universality and obstinacy of the fact of sin,

are an impenetrable veil between us and all real understanding of Jesus

Christ. There is no adequate motive for such an astounding fact as the

incarnation and sacrifice of the Son of God, except the purpose of

redeeming the world. If you do not believe that you--you individually,

and all of us your brethren--need to be cleansed, you will find it hard

to believe in the divinity and atonement of Jesus Christ. If you have

been down into the depths of your own heart, and found out what

tremendous, diabolic power your own evil nature and sin have upon you,

then you will not be content with anything less than the incarnate God

who stoops from heaven to bear the burden of your sin, and to take it

all away. If you want to understand why He laid aside His garments and

took the servile form of our manhood, the appeal of man's sin to His

love and the answer of His Divine condescension are the only

explanation.

Again, let me remind you that there is no cleansing without Christ. Can

you do it for yourselves, do you think? There is an old proverb, One

hand washes the other.' That is true about stains on the flesh. It is

not true about stains on our spirits. Nobody can do it for us but Jesus

Christ alone. He kneels before us, having the right and the power to

wash us because He has died for us. Kings of England used to touch for

the king's evil,' and lay their pure fingers upon feculent masses of

corruption. Our King's touch is sovereign for the corruption and

incipient putrefaction of our sin; and there is no power in heaven or

earth that will make a man clean except the power of Jesus Christ. It

is either Jesus Christ or filthiness.

If I might pass from my text for one moment, I would remind you of the

episode which immediately follows, and suggest that if Jesus Christ is

not cleansing us He is nothing to us. If I wash thee not, thou hast no

part in Me.' I know, of course, that it is possible to have partial,

rudimentary, and sometimes reverent conceptions of that Lord without

recognising in Him the great Fountain opened for sin and for

uncleanness.' But I am sure of this, that there is no real, living

possession of Jesus Christ such as men's souls need, and such as will

outlast the disintegrating influences of death, unless it be such a

possession of Him as appropriates for its own, primarily, His cleansing

power. First of all He must cleanse, and then all other aspects of His

glory, and gifts of His grace, will pour into our hearts.

No understanding of Christ, then, without the recognition that

cleansing is the purpose and the vindication of His incarnation and

sacrifice; no cleansing without Christ; no Christ worth calling by the

name without cleansing.

IV. And so, lastly, note the pattern in this act.

You will remember that it is followed by solemn words spoken after He

had taken His garments and resumed His place at the table, in which

there blended, in the most wonderful fashion, the consciousness of

authority, both as Teacher of truth and as Guide of life, and the

sweetest and most loving lowliness. In them Jesus prescribed the

wonderful act of His condescending love and cleansing power as the law

of the Christian life. There are too many of us who profess to be quite

willing to trust to Jesus Christ as the Cleanser of our souls who are

not nearly so willing to accept His Example as the pattern for our

lives; and I would have you note, as an extremely remarkable point,

that all the New Testament references to our Lord as being our Example

are given in immediate connection with His passion. The very part of

His life which we generally regard as being most absolutely unique and

inimitable is the fact in His life which Apostles and Evangelists

select as the one to set before us for our example.

Do you ask if any man can copy the sufferings of Jesus Christ? In

regard to their virtue and efficacy, No. In regard to their motive--in

one aspect, No; in another aspect, Yes. In regard to the spirit that

impelled Him we may copy Him. The smallest trickle of water down a city

gutter will carve out of the mud at its side little banks and cliffs,

and exhibit all the phenomena of erosion on the largest scale, as the

Mississippi does over half a continent, and the tiniest little wave in

a basin will fall into the same curves as the billows of mid-ocean. You

and I, in our little lives, may even aspire to do as I have done to

you.'

The true use of superiority is service. Noblesse oblige! Bank, wealth,

capacity, talents, all things are given to us that we may use them to

the last particle for our fellows. Only when the world and society have

awakened to that great truth which the towel-girded, kneeling Christ

has taught us, will society be organised on the principles that God

meant.

But, further, the highest form of service is to cleanse. Cleansing is

always dirty work for the cleaners, as every housemaid knows. You

cannot make people clean by scolding them, by lecturing them, by

patronising them. You have to go down into the filth if you mean to

lift them out of it; and leave your smelling-bottles behind; and think

nothing repulsive if your stooping to it may save a brother.

The only way by which we can imitate that example is by, first of all,

participating in it for ourselves. We must, first of all, have the

Cross as our trust, before it can become our pattern and our law. We

must first say, Lord! not my feet only, but also my hands and my head,'

and then, in the measure in which we ourselves have received the

cleansing benediction, we shall be impelled and able to lay our gentle

hands on foulness and leprosy; and to say to all the impure, Jesus

Christ, who hath cleansed me, makes thee clean.'

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THE DISMISSAL OF JUDAS

. . . Then said Jesus unto Judas, That thou doest, do quickly.'--JOHN

xiii. 27.

When our Lord gave the morsel, dipped in the dish, to Judas, only John

knew the significance of the act. But if we supplement the narrative

here with that given by Matthew, we shall find that, accompanying the

gift of the sop, was a brief dialogue in which the betrayer, with

unabashed front, hypocritically said, Lord! Is it I?' and heard the

solemn, sad answer, Thou sayest!' Two things, then, appealed to him at

the moment: one, the conviction that he was discovered; the other, the

wonderful assurance that he was still loved, for the gift of the morsel

was a token of friendliness. He shut his heart against them both; and

as he shut his heart against Christ he opened it to the devil. So after

the sop Satan entered into him.' At that moment a soul committed

suicide; and none of those that sat by, with the exception of Christ

and the disciple whom He loved,' so much as dreamed of the tragedy

going on before their eyes.

I know not that there are anywhere words more weighty and wonderful

than those of our text. And I desire to try if I can at all make you

feel as I feel, their solemn signification and force. That thou doest,

do quickly.'

I. I hear in them, first, the voice of despairing love abandoning the

conflict.

If I have rightly construed the meaning of the incident, this is the

plain meaning of it. And you will observe that the Revised Version,

more accurately and closely rendering the words of our text, begins

with a Therefore.' Therefore said Jesus unto him,' because the die was

cast; because the will of Judas had conclusively welcomed Satan, and

conclusively rejected Christ; therefore, knowing that remonstrance was

vain, knowing that the deed was, in effect, done, Jesus Christ, that

Incarnate Charity which believeth all things, and hopeth all things,'

abandoned the man to himself, and said, There, then, if thou wilt thou

must. I have done all I can; my last arrow is shot, and it has missed

the target. That then doest, do quickly.'

There is a world of solemn meaning in that one little word doest.' It

teaches us the old lesson, which sense is so apt to forget, that the

true actor in man's deeds is the hidden man of the heart,' and that

when it has acted, it matters comparatively little whether the mere

tool and instrument of the hands or of the other organs have carried

out the behest. The thing is done before it is done when the man has

resolved, with a fixed will, to do it. The betrayal was as good as in

process, though no step beyond the introductory ones, which could

easily have been cancelled, had yet been accomplished. Because there

was a fixed purpose which could not be altered by anything now,

therefore Jesus Christ regards the act as completed. It is what we

think in our hearts that we are; and our fixed determinations, our

inclinations of will, are far more truly our doings than the mere

consequences of these, embodied in actuality. It is but a poor estimate

of a man that judges him by the test of what he has done. What he has

wanted to do is the true man; what he has attempted to do. It was well

that it was in thine heart!' saith God to the king who thought of

building the Temple which he was never allowed to rear. It is ill that

is in thine heart,' says He by whom actions are weighed, to the sinner

in purpose, though his clean hands lie idly in his lap. These hidden

movements of desire and will that never come to the surface are our

true selves. Look after them, and the deeds will take care of

themselves. Serpent's eggs have serpents in them. And he that has

determined upon a sin has done the sin, whether his hands have been put

to it or no.

But, then, turn for a moment to the other thought that is suggested

here--that solemn picture of a soul left to do as it will, because

divine love has no other restraints which it can impose, and is

bankrupt of motives that it can adduce to prevent it from its madness.

Now I do not believe, for my part, that any man in this world is so

all-round sold unto sin' as that the seeking love of God gives him up

as irreclaimable. I do not believe that there are any people concerning

whom it is true that it is impossible for the grace of God to find some

chink and cranny in their souls through which it can enter and change

them. There are no hopeless cases as long as men are here. But, then,

though there may not be so, in regard to the whole sweep of the man's

nature, yet every one of us, over and over again, has known what it is

to come exactly into that position in regard to some single evil or

other, concerning which we have so set our teeth and planted our feet

at such an angle of resistance as that God gives up dealing with us and

leaves us, as He did with Balaam when He opposed his covetous

inclinations to all the remonstrances of Heaven. God said at last to

him Go!' because it was the best way to teach him what a fool he had

been in wanting to go. Thus, when we determine to set ourselves against

the pleadings and the beseechings of divine love, the truest kindness

is to fling the reins upon our necks, and let us gallop ourselves into

a sweat and weariness, and then we shall be more amenable to the touch

of the rein thereafter.

Are there any people whom God is teaching obedience to His light touch,

by letting them run their course after some one specific sin? Perhaps

there are. At all events, let us remember that that position of being

allowed to do as we like is one to which we all tend, in the measure in

which we indulge our inclinations, and shut our hearts against God's

pleadings. There is such a thing as a conscience seared as with a hot

iron. They used to say that there were witches' marks on the body,

places where, if you stuck a pin in, there was no feeling. Men cover

themselves all over with marks of that sort, which are not sensitive

even to the prick of a divine remonstrance, rebuke, or retribution.

They wipe their mouths and say I have done no harm.' You can tie up the

clapper of the bell that swings on the black rock, on which, if you

drift, you go to pieces. You can silence the Voice by the simple

process of neglecting it. Judas set his teeth against two things, the

solemn conviction that Jesus Christ knew his sin, and the saving

assurance that Jesus Christ loved him still. And whosoever resists

either of these two is getting perilously near to the point where, not

in petulance but in pity, God will say, Very well, I have called and ye

have refused. Now go, and do what you want to do, and see how you like

it when it is done. What thou doest, do quickly.' Do you remember the

other word, If twere done when tis done, then twere well it were done

quickly'? But since consequences last when deeds are past, perhaps you

had better halt before you determine to do them.

II. Now, secondly, I hear in these words the voice of strangely blended

majesty and humiliation.

What thou doest, do!' Judas thought he had got possession of Christ's

person, and was His master in a very real sense. When lo! all at once

the victim assumes the position of the Lord and commands, showing the

traitor that instead of thwarting and counterworking, he was but

carrying out the designs of his fancied victim; and that he was an

instrument in Christ's hands for the execution of His will. And these

two thoughts, how, in effect, all antagonism, all malicious hatred, all

violent opposition of every sort but work in with Christ's purpose, and

carry out His intention; and how, at the moments of deepest apparent

degradation, He towers, in manifest Majesty and Masterhood, seem to me

to be plainly taught in the word before us.

He uses his foes for the furtherance of His purpose. That has been the

history of the world ever since. The floods, O Lord, have lifted up

their voice.' And what have they done? Smashing against the breakwater,

they but consolidate its mighty blocks, and prove that the Lord on high

is mightier than the noise of many waters.' It has been so in the past,

it is so to-day; it will be so till the end. Every Judas is

unconsciously the servant of Him whom he seeks to betray; and finds out

to his bewilderment that what he meant for a death-blow is fulfilling

the very purpose and will of the Lord against whom he has turned.

Again, the combination here, in such remarkable juxtaposition, of the

two things, a willing submission to the utmost extremity of shame,

which the treasonous heart can froth out in its malice and, at the same

time, a rising up in conscious majesty and lordship, are suggested to

us by the words before us. That combination of utter lowliness and

transcendent loftiness runs through the whole life and history of our

Lord. Did you ever think how strong an argument that strange

combination, brought out so inartificially throughout the whole of the

Gospels, is for their historical veracity? Suppose the problem had been

given to poets to create and to set in a series of appropriate scenes a

character with these two opposites stamped equally upon it, neither of

them impinging upon the domain of the other--viz., utter humility and

humiliation in circumstance, and majestic sovereignty and elevation

above all circumstances--do you think that any of them could have

solved the problem, though-- Aeschylus and Shakespeare had been amongst

them, as these four men that wrote these four little tracts that we

call Gospels have done? How comes it that this most difficult of

literary problems has been so triumphantly solved by these men? I think

there is only one answer, Because they were reporters, and imagined

nothing, but observed everything, and repeated what had happened.' He

reconciled these opposites who was the Man of Sorrows and acquainted

with grief, and yet the Eternal Son of the Father; and the Gospels have

solved the problem only because they are simple records of its solution

by Him.

Wherever in His history there is some trait of lowliness there is by

the side of it a flash of majesty. Wherever in His history there is

some gleaming out from the veil of flesh of the hidden glory of

divinity, there is immediately some drawing of the veil across the

glory. And the two things do not contradict nor confuse, but we stand

before that double picture of a Christ betrayed and of a Christ

commanding His betrayer, and using his treason, and we say, The Word

was made flesh, and dwelt among us.'

III. Again, I hear the voice of instinctive human weakness.

That thou doest, do quickly.' It may be doubtful, and some of you

perhaps may not be disposed to follow me in my remark, but to my ear

that sounds just like the utterance of that instinctive dislike of

suspense and of the long hanging over us of the sword by a hair, which

we all know so well. Better to suffer than to wait for suffering. The

loudest thunder-crash is not so awe-inspiring as the dread silence of

nature when the sky is black before the peal rolls through the clouds.

Many a martyr has prayed for a swift ending of his troubles. Many a

sorrowing heart, that has been sitting cowering under the anticipation

of coming evils, has wished that the string could be pulled, as it

were, and they could all come down in one cold flood, and be done with,

rather than trickle drop by drop. They tell us that the bravest

soldiers dislike the five minutes when they stand in rank before the

first shot is fired. And with all reverence I venture to think that He

who knew all our weaknesses in so far as weakness was not sin, is here

letting us see how He, too, desired that the evil which was coming

might come quickly, and that the painful tension of expectation might

be as brief as possible. That may be doubtful; I do not dwell upon it,

but I suggest it for your consideration.

IV. And then I pass on to the last of the tones that I hear in these

utterances--the voice of the willing Sacrifice for the sins of the

world.

That thou doest, do quickly.' There is nothing more obvious throughout

the whole of the latter portion of the Gospel narrative than the way in

which, increasingly towards its close, Jesus seemed to hasten to the

Cross. You remember His own sayings: I have a baptism to be baptized

with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished. I am come to

cast fire on the earth; would it were already kindled!' You remember

with what a strange air--I was going to use an inappropriate word, and

say, of alacrity; but, at all events, of fixed resolve--He journeyed

from Galilee, in that last solemn march to Jerusalem, and how the

disciples followed, astonished at the unwonted look of decision and

absorption that was printed upon His countenance. If we consider His

doings in that last week in Jerusalem, how he courted publicity, how He

avoided no encounter with His official enemies, how He sharpened His

tones, not exactly so as to provoke, but certainly so as by no means to

conciliate, we shall see, I think, in it all, His consciousness that

the hour had come, and His absolute readiness and willingness to be

offered for the world's sin. He stretches out His hands, as it were, to

draw the Cross nearer to Himself, not with any share in the weakness of

a fanatical aspiration after martyrdom, but under a far deeper and more

wonderful impulse.

Why was Christ so willing, so eager, if I may use the word, that His

death should be accomplished? Two reasons, which at the bottom are one,

answer the question. He thus hastened to His Cross because He would

obey the Father's will, and because He loved the whole world--you and

me and all our fellows. We were each in His heart. It was because He

wanted to save thee that He said to Judas, Do it quickly, that the

world's salvation and that man's salvation may be accomplished.' These

were the cords that bound Him to the altar. Let us never forget that

Judas with his treachery, and rulers with their hostility, and Pilate

with his authority, and the soldiers with their nails, and centurions

with their lances, and the grim figure of Death itself with its shaft,

would have been all equally powerless against Christ if it had not been

his loving will to die on the Cross for each of us.

Therefore, brethren, as we hear this voice, let us discern in it the

tones which warn us of the danger of yielding to inclination and

stifling His rebukes, till He abandons us for the moment in despair;

let us hear in it the pathetic voice of a Brother, who knows all our

weaknesses and has felt our emotions; let us hear the voice of

Sovereign Authority which uses its enemies for its purposes, and is

never loftier than when it is most lowly, whose Cross is His throne of

glory, whose exaltation is His deepest humiliation, and let us hear a

love which, discerning each of us through all the ages and the crowds,

went willingly to the Cross because He willed that He should be our

Saviour.

And seeing that time is short, and the future precarious, and delay may

darken into loss and rejection, let us take these words as spoken to us

in another sense, and hear in them the warning that to-day, if we will

hear His voice, we harden not our hearts,' and when He says to us, in

regard to repentance and faith, and Christian consecration and service,

That thou doest, do quickly,' let us answer, I made haste and delayed

not, but made haste to keep Thy commandments.'

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THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man

glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God he glorified in Him, God

shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify

Him.'--JOHN xiii. 31, 32.

There is something very weird and awful in the brief note of time with

which the Evangelist sends Judas on his dark errand. He . . . went

immediately out, and it was night.' Into the darkness that dark soul

went. That hour was the power of darkness,' the very keystone of the

black arch of man's sin, and some shadow of it fell upon the soul of

Christ Himself.

In immediate connection with the departure of the traitor comes this

singular burst of triumph in our text. The Evangelist emphasises the

connection by that: Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said.' There

is a wonderful touch of truth and naturalness in that connection. The

traitor was gone. His presence had been a restraint; and now that that

spot in their feast of charity' had disappeared, the Master felt at

ease; and like some stream, out of the bed of which a black rock has

been taken, His words flow more freely. How intensely real and human

the narrative becomes when we see that Christ, too, felt the oppression

of an uncongenial presence, and was relieved and glad at its removal!

The departure of the traitor evoked these words of triumph in another

way, too. At his going away, we may say, the match was lit that was to

be applied to the train. He had gone out on his dark errand, and that

brought the Cross within measurable distance of our Lord. Out of a new

sense of its nearness He speaks here. So the note of time not only

explains to us why our Lord spoke, but puts us on the right track for

understanding His words, and makes any other interpretation of them

than one impossible. What Judas went to do was the beginning of

Christ's glorifying. We have here, then, a triple glorification--the

Son of Man glorified in His Cross; God glorified in the Son of Man; and

the Son of Man glorified in God. Let us look at these three thoughts

for a few moments now.

I. First, we have here the Son of Man glorified in His Cross.

The words are a paradox. Strange, that at such a moment, when there

rose up before Christ all the vision of the shame and the suffering,

the pain and the death, and the mysterious sense of abandonment, which

was worse than them all, He should seem to stretch out His hands to

bring the Cross nearer to Himself, and that His soul should fill with

triumph!

There is a double aspect under which our Lord regarded His sufferings.

On the one hand we mark in Him an unmistakable shrinking from the

Cross, the innocent shrinking of His manhood expressed in such words as

I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it

be accomplished'; and in such incidents as the agony in Gethsemane. And

yet, side by side with that, not overcome by it, but not overcoming it,

there is the opposite feeling, the reaching out almost with eagerness

to bring the Cross nearer to Himself. These two lie close by each other

in His heart. Like the pellucid waters of the Rhine and the turbid

stream of the Moselle, that flow side by side over a long space,

neither of them blending discernibly with the other, so the shrinking

and the desire were contemporaneous in Christ's mind. Here we have the

triumphant anticipation rising to the surface, and conquering for a

time the shrinking.

Why did Christ think of His Cross as a glorifying? The New Testament

generally represents it as the very lowest point of His degradation;

John's Gospel always represents it as the very highest point of His

glory. And the two things are both true; just as the zenith of our sky

is the nadir of the sky for those on the other side of the world. The

same fact which in one aspect sounds the very lowest depth of Christ's

humiliation, in another aspect is the very highest culminating point of

His glory.

How did the Cross glorify Christ? In two ways. It was the revelation of

His heart; it was the throne of His sovereign power.

It was the revelation of His heart. All his life long He had been

trying to tell the world how much He loved it. His love had been, as it

were, filtered by drops through His words, through His deeds, through

His whole demeanour and bearing; but in His death it comes in a flood,

and pours itself upon the world. All His life long he had been

revealing His heart, through the narrow rifts of His deeds, like some

slender lancet windows; but in His death all the barriers are thrown

down, and the brightness blazes out upon men. All through His life He

had been trying to communicate His love to the world, and the fragrance

came from the box of ointment exceeding precious, but when the box was

broken the house was filled with the odour.

For Him to be known was to be glorified. So pure and perfect was He,

that revelation of His character and glorification of Himself were one

and the same thing. Because His Cross reveals to the world for all

time, and for eternity, too, a love which shrinks from no sacrifice, a

love which is capable of the most entire abandonment, a love which is

diffused over the whole surface of humanity and through all the ages, a

love which comes laden with the richest and the highest gifts, even the

turning of selfish and sinful hearts into its own pure and perfect

likeness, therefore does He say, in contemplation of that Cross which

was to reveal Him for what He was to the world, and to bring His love

to every one of us, Now is the Son of Man glorified.'

We can fancy a mother, for instance, in the anticipation of shame, and

ignominy, and suffering, and sorrow, and death which she encounters for

the sake of some prodigal child, forgetting all the ignominy, and the

shame, and the suffering, and the sorrow, and the death, because all

these are absorbed in the one thought: If I bear them, my poor,

wandering, rebellious child will know at last how much I loved him.' So

Christ yearns to impart the knowledge of Himself to us, because by that

knowledge we may be won to His love and service; and hence when He

looks forward to the agony, and contumely, and sorrow of the close,

every other thought is swallowed up in this one: They will be the means

by which the whole world will find out how deep my heart of love to it

was.' Therefore does He triumph and say, Now is the Son of Man

glorified.'

Still further, He regards His Cross as the means of His glorifying,

because it is His throne of saving power. The paradoxical words of our

text rest upon His profound conviction that in His death He was about

to put forth a mightier and diviner power than ever He had manifested

in His life. They are the same in effect and in tone as the great

words: I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.' Now I want you

to ask yourselves one question: In what sense is Christ's Cross

Christ's glorifying, unless His Cross bears an altogether different

relation to His life from what the death of a great teacher or

benefactor ordinarily bears to his? It is impossible that Christ could

have spoken such words as these of my text if He had simply thought of

His death as a Plato or a John Howard might have thought of his, as

being the close of his activity for the welfare of his fellows. Unless

Christ's death has in it some substantive value, unless it is something

more than the mere termination of His work for the world, I see not how

the words before us can be interpreted. If His death is His glorifying,

it must be because in that death something is done which was not

completed by the life, however fair; by the words, however wise and

tender; by the works of power, however restorative and healing. Here is

something more than these present. What more? This more, that His Cross

is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.' He is glorified

therein, not as a Socrates might be glorified by his calm and noble

death; not because nothing in His life became Him better than the

leaving of it; not because the page that tells the story of His passion

is turned to by us as the tenderest and most sacred in the world's

records; but because in that death He wrestled with and overcame our

foes, and because, like the Jewish hero of old, dying, He pulled down

the house which our tyrants had built, and overwhelmed them in its

ruins. Now is the Son of Man glorified.'

And so, brethren, there blend, in that last act of our Lord's--for His

death was His act--in strange fashion, the two contradictory ideas of

glory and shame; like some sky, all full of dark thunderclouds, and yet

between them the brightest blue and the blazing sunshine. In the Cross,

Death crowns Him the Prince of Life, and His Cross is His throne. All

His life long He was the Light of the World, but the very noontide hour

of His glory was that hour when the shadow of eclipse lay over all the

land, and He hung on the Cross dying in the dark. At His eventide it

was light.' He endured the Cross, despising the shame'; and lo! the

shame flashed up into the very brightness of glory, and the ignominy

and the suffering became the jewels of His crown. Now is the Son of Man

glorified.'

II. Now let us turn for a moment to the second of the threefold

glorifications that are set forth here: God glorified in the Son of

Man.

The mystery deepens as we advance. That God should be glorified in a

man is not strange, but that He should be so glorified in the eminent

and special fashion which Jesus contemplates here, is strange; and

stranger still when we think that the act in which He was to be

glorified was the death of an innocent Man. If God, in any special and

eminent manner, is glorified in the Cross of Jesus Christ, that

implies, as it seems to me, two things at all events--many more which I

have not time to touch upon, but two things very plainly. One is that

God was in Christ,' in some singular and eminent manner. If all His

life was a continual manifestation of the divine character, if Christ's

words were the divine wisdom, if Christ's compassion was the divine

pity, if Christ's lowliness was the divine gentleness, if His whole

human life and nature were the brightest and clearest manifestation to

the world of what God is, we can understand that the Cross was the

highest point of the revelation of the divine nature to the world, and

so was the glorifying of God in Him. But if we take any lower view of

the relation between God and Christ, I know not how we can acquit these

words of our Master of the charge of being a world too wide for the

facts of the case.

The words involve, as it seems to me, not only that idea of a close,

unique union and indwelling of God in Christ, but they involve also

this other: that these sufferings bore no relation to the deserts of

the person who endured them. If Christ, with His pure and perfect

character--the innocency and nobleness of which all that read the

Gospels admit--if Christ suffered so; if the highest virtue that was

ever seen in this world brought no better wages than shame and spitting

and the Cross; if Christ's life and Christ's death are simply a typical

example of the world's treatment of its greatest benefactors; then, if

they have any bearing at all on the character of God, they cast a

shadow rather than a light upon the divine government, and become not

the least formidable of the difficulties and knots that will have to be

untied hereafter before it shall be clear that God did everything well.

But if we can say, He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows';

if we can say, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself'; if

we can say, that His death was the death of Him whom God had appointed

to live and die for us, and to bear our sins in His own body on the

tree,' then, though deep mysteries come with the thought, still we can

see that, in a very unique manner, God is glorified and exalted in His

death.

For if the dying Christ be the Son of God dying for us, then the Cross

glorifies God, because it teaches us that the glory of the divine

character is the divine love. Of wisdom, or of power, or of any of the

more majestic' attributes of the divine nature, that weak Man, hanging

dying on the Cross, was a strange embodiment; but if the very heart of

the divine brightness be the pure white fire of love; if there be

nothing diviner in God than His giving of Himself to His creatures; if

the highest glory of the divine nature be to pity and to bestow, then

the Cross upon which Christ died towers above all other revelations as

the most awful, the most sacred, the most tender, the most complete,

the most heart-touching, the most soul-subduing manifestation of the

divine nature; and stars and worlds, and angels and mighty creatures,

and things in the heights and things in the depths, to each of which

have been entrusted some broken syllables of the divine character to

make known to the world, dwindle and fade before the brightness, the

lambent, gentle brightness that beams out from the Cross of Christ,

which proclaims--God is love, is pity, is pardon.

And is it not so--is it not so? Is not the thought that has flowed from

Christ's Cross through Christendom of what our Father in Heaven is, the

highest and the most blessed that the world has ever had? Has it not

scattered doubts that lay like mountains of ice upon man's heart? Has

it not swept the heavens clear of clouds that wrapped it in darkness?

Has it not delivered men from the dreams of gods angry, gods

capricious, gods vengeful, gods indifferent, gods simply mighty and

vast and awful and unspeakable? Has it not taught us that love is God,

and God is love; and so brought to the whole world the true Gospel, the

Gospel of the grace of God? In that Cross the Father is glorified.

III. Now, lastly, we have here the Son of Man glorified in the Father.

The mysteries and the paradoxes seem to deepen as we advance. If God be

glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall

straightway glorify Him.' Do these words sound to you as if they

expressed no more than the confidence of a good man, who, when he was

dying, believed that he would be accepted of a loving Father, and would

be at rest from his sufferings? To me they seem to say infinitely more

than that. He shall also glorify Him in Himself.' Mark that in

Himself.' That is the obvious antithesis to what has been spoken about

in the previous clause, a glorifying which consisted in a manifestation

to the external universe, whereas this is a glorifying within the

depths of the divine nature. And the best commentary upon it is our

Lord's own words: Father! glorify Thou Me with the glory which I had

with Thee before the world was.' We get a glimpse, as it were, into the

very centre of the brightness of God; and there, walking in that

beneficent furnace, we see One like unto the Son of Man.' Christ

anticipates that, in some profound and unspeakable sense, He shall, as

it were, be caught up into the divinity, and shall dwell, as indeed He

did dwell from the beginning, in the bosom of the Father.' He shall

glorify Him in Himself.'

But then mark, still further, that this reception into the bosom of the

Father is given to the Son of Man. That is to say, the Man Christ

Jesus, the Son of Mary, the Brother of us all, bone of our bone and

flesh of our flesh,' the very Person that walked upon earth and dwelt

amongst us is taken up into the heart of God, and in His manhood enters

into that same glory, which, from the beginning, the Eternal Word had

with God.

And still further, not only have we here set forth, in most wondrous

language, the reception and incorporation, if we may use such words,

into the very centre of divinity, as granted to the Son of Man, but we

have that glorifying set forth as commencing immediately upon the

completion of God's glorifying by Christ upon the Cross. He shall

straightway glorify Him.' At the instant then, that He said, It is

finished,' and all that the Cross could do to glorify God was done, at

that instant there began, with not a pin-point of interval between

them, God's glorifying of the Son in Himself. It began in that Paradise

into which we know that upon that day He entered. It was manifested to

the world when He raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory.' It

reached a still higher point when they brought Him near unto the

Ancient of Days,' and ascending up on high, a dominion and a throne and

a glory were given to Him which last now, whilst the Son of Man sits in

the heavens on the throne of His glory, wielding the attributes of

divinity, and administering the laws of the universe and the mysteries

of providence. It shall rise to its highest manifestation before an

assembled world, when He shall come in His glory, and before Him shall

be gathered all nations.'

This, then, was the vision that lay before the Christ in that upper

room, the vision of Himself glorified in His extreme shame, because His

Cross manifested His love and His saving power; of God glorified in Him

above all other of His acts of manifestation when He died on the Cross,

and revealed the very heart of God; and of Himself glorified in the

Father when, exalted high above all creatures, He sitteth upon the

Father's throne and rules the Father's realm.

And yet from that high, and, to us, inaccessible and all but

inconceivable summit of His elevation, He looks down ready to bless

each poor creature here, toiling and moiling amidst sufferings, and

meannesses, and commonplaces, and monotony, if we will only put our

trust in Him, and love Him, and see the brightness of the Father's face

in Him. He cares for us all; and if we will but take Him as our

Saviour, His all-prevalent prayer, presented within the veil for us,

will certainly be fulfilled at last: Father, I will that they also whom

Thou hast given Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My

glory.'

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CANNOT AND CAN

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me:

and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go ye cannot come; so now I say

to you.'--JOHN xiii. 33.

The preceding context shows how large and black the Cross loomed before

Jesus now, and how radiant the glory beyond shone out to Him. But it

was only for a moment that either of these two absorbed His thoughts;

and with wonderful self-forgetfulness and self-command, He turned away

at once from the consideration of how the near future was to affect

Him, to the thought of how it was to affect the handful of helpless

disciples who had to be left alone. Impending separation breaks up the

fountains of the heart, and we all know the instinct that desires to

crowd all the often hidden love into some one last token. So here our

Lord addresses His disciples by a name that is never used except this

once, little children,' a fond diminutive that not only reveals an

unusual depth of tender emotion, but also breathes a pitying sense of

their defencelessness when they are to be left alone. So might a dying

mother look at her little ones.

But the words that follow, at first sight, are dark with the sense of a

final and complete separation. Ye shall seek Me'--and not only so, but

He seems to put back His humble friends into the same place as had been

occupied by His bitter foes--as I said to the Jews, whither I go ye

cannot come; so now I say to you.' There was something that prevented

both classes alike from keeping Him company; and He had to walk His

path both into the darkness and into the glory, alone.

The words apply in their fullness only to the parenthesis of time

whilst He lay in the grave, and the disciples despairingly thought that

all was ended. It was a brief period: it was a revolutionary moment;

and though it was soon to end, they needed to be guarded against it.

But though the words do not apply to the permanent relation between the

glorified Christ and us, His disciples, yet partly by similarity, and

still more by contrast, they do suggest great Christian blessedness and

imperative Christian duties. These gather themselves mainly round two

contrasts, a transitory cannot' soon to be changed into a permanent

can'; and a momentary seeking, soon to be converted into a blessed

seeking which finds. I now deal only with the former.

We have here a transitory cannot' soon to be changed into a permanent

can.'

Whither I go ye cannot come.' Does not one hear a tone of personal

sorrow in that saying? Jesus had always hungered for understanding and

sympathetic companions, and one of His lifelong sorrows had been His

utter loneliness; but He had never, in all the time that He had been

with them, so put out His hand, feeling for some warm clasp of a human

hand to help Him in His struggle, as He did during the hours

terminating with Gethsemane. And perhaps we may venture to say that we

hear in this utterance an expression of Christ's sorrow for Himself

that He had to tread the dark way, and to pass into the brightness

beyond, all alone. He yearned for the impossible human companionship,

as well as sorrowed for the imperfections which made it impossible.

Why was it that they could not follow Him now'? The answer to that

question is found in the consideration of whither it was that He went.

When that bright Shekinah-cloud at the Ascension received Him into its

radiant folds, it showed why they could not follow Him, because it

revealed that He went unto the Father, when He left the world. So we

are brought face to face with the old, solemn thought that character

makes capacity for heaven. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord,

or who shall stand in His holy place?' asked the Psalmist; and a

prophet put the question in a still sharper form, and by the very form

of the question suggested a negative answer--Who among us shall dwell

with the devouring fire; who among us shall dwell with everlasting

burnings?' Who can pass into that Presence, and stand near God, without

being, like the maiden in the old legend, shrivelled into ashes by the

contact of the celestial fire? Holiness' is that without which no man

shall see the Lord.' And we, all of us, in the depths of our own

hearts, if we rightly understand the voices that ever echo there, must

feel that the condition which is, obviously and without any need for

arguing it, required for abiding with God, and so going into the glory

where Christ is, is a condition which none of us can fulfil. In that

respect the imperfect and immature friends, the little children, the

babes who loved and yet knew not Him whom they loved, and the scowling

enemies, were at one. For they had all of them the one human heart, and

in that heart the deep-lying alienation and contrariety to God.

Therefore Christ trod the winepress alone, and alone ascended up where

He was before.'

But let us remember that this cannot' was only a transitory cannot. For

we must underscore very deeply that word in my text so now I say to

you,' and a moment afterwards, when one of the Apostles puts the

question: Why cannot I follow Thee now?' the answer is: Thou canst not

follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards.' The text, too, is

succeeded immediately by the wonderful parting consolations and

counsels spoken to the disciples, through all of which there gleams the

promise that they will be with Him where He is, and behold His glory.

Set side by side with these sad words of our Lord in the text, by which

He unloosed their clasping hands from Him, and turned His face to His

solitary path, the triumphant language in which habitually the rest of

the New Testament speaks of the Christian man's relation to Christ.

Think of that great passage: Ye are come unto the city of the living

God, the heavenly Jerusalem, . . . and to God the Judge of all, . . .

and to Jesus the Mediator of the new Covenant.' What has become of the

impossibility? Vanished. Where is the cannot'? Turned into a blessed

can.' And so Apostles have no scruple in saying, Our citizenship is in

Heaven,' nor in saying, We sit together with Him in heavenly places in

Christ Jesus.' The path that was blocked is open. The impossibility

that towered up like a great black wall has melted away; and the path

into the Holiest of all is made patent by the blood of Christ. For in

that death there lies the power that sweeps away all the impediments of

man's sin, and in that life of the risen, glorified, indwelling Christ

there lies the power which cleanses the inmost heart from all

filthiness of flesh and spirit,' and makes it possible for our mortal

feet to walk on the immortal path, and for us, with all our

unworthiness, with all our shrinking, to stand in His presence and not

be ashamed or consumed. Ye cannot come' was true for a few days. Ye can

come' is true for ever; and for all Christian men.

But let us not forget that the one attitude of heart and mind, by which

a poor, sinful man, who dare not draw near to God, receives into

himself the merit and power of the death, and the indwelling power of

the life, of Jesus Christ, is personal faith in Jesus Christ. To trust

Him is to come to Him, and it is represented in Scripture as conferring

an instantaneous fitness for access to God. People pray sometimes that

they may be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light,' and

the prayer is, in a sense, wise and true. But they too often forget

that the Apostle says, in the original connection of the words which

they so quote: He hath translated us from the tyranny of the darkness,

and hath made us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.' That

is to say, whenever a poor soul, compassed and laden with its infirmity

and sin, turns itself to that Lord whose Cross conquers sin, and whose

blood infused into our veins--the Spirit of whose life granted to

us--gives us to partake of His own righteousness, that moment that soul

can tread the path that brings into the presence of God, and has access

with confidence by the faith of Him.' So, brethren, seeing that thus

the incapacity may all be swept away, and that instead of a cannot,'

which relegates us to darkness, we may receive a can' which leads us

into the light, let us see to it that this communion, which is possible

for all Christian men, is real in our cases, and that we use the access

which is given to us, and dwell for ever in, and with, the Lord.

I have said that the act of faith, by associating a man with Jesus

Christ in the power of His death and of His life, makes any who

exercise it capable of passing into the presence of God. But I would

remind you, too, that to make us more fit for more full and habitual

communion is the very purpose for which all the discipline of our

earthly life, its sorrows and its joys, its tasks and its repose, is

exercised upon us--He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His

holiness.' Surely if we habitually took that point of view in reference

to our work, in reference to our joys, in reference to our trials,

everything would be different. We are being prepared with sedulous

love, with patient reiteration of line upon line, precept upon

precept,' with singularly varied methods but a uniform purpose, by all

that meets us in life, to be more capable of treading the eternal path

into the eternal light. Is that how we daily think of our own

circumstances? Do we bring that great thought to bear upon all that we,

sometimes faithlessly, call mysterious or murmuringly think of--if we

dare not speak our thought--as being cruel and hard? What does it

matter if some precious things be lifted off our shoulders, and out of

our hearts, if their being taken away makes it more possible for us to

tread with a lighter step the path of peace? What matters it though

many things that we would fain keep are withdrawn from us, if by the

withdrawal we are sent a little further forward on the road that leads

to God? As George Herbert says, sorrows and joys are like battledores

that drive a shuttlecock, and they may all toss us to His breast.' In

faith, however infantile it may be, there is an undeveloped capacity, a

germ of fitness, for dwelling with God. But that capacity is meant to

be increased, and the little children are meant to be helped to grow up

into full-grown men, the measure of the stature of the fullness of

Christ,' by all that comes here to them on earth. Do you not think we

should understand life better, do you not think it would all be flashed

up into new radiance, do you not think we should more seldom stand

bewildered at what we choose to call the inscrutable dispensations of

Providence, if this were the point of view from which we looked at them

all--that they were fitting us for perpetual abiding with our Father

God?

Nor let us forget that there was a transient cannot' of another sort.

For flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.' So, as life is

changed when we think of it as helping us toward Him, death is changed

when we think of it as being, if I may so say, the usher in attendance

on the Presence-chamber, who draws back the thin curtain that separates

us from the throne, and takes us by the hands and leads us into the

Presence. Surely if we habitually thought thus of that otherwise grim

chamberlain, we should be willing to put our hands into His, as a

little child will, when straying, into the hands of a stranger who

says, Come with me and I will take you home to your father.' As I said

unto the Jews . . . so now I say to you, whither I go, ye cannot come.'

Let us press on you and on myself the one thought that comes out of all

that I have been saying, the blessed possibility, which, because it is

a possibility, is an obligation, to use far more than most of us do,

the right of access to the King who is our Father. There are nobles and

corporate bodies, who regard it as one of their chief distinctions that

they have always the right of entree to the court of the sovereign.

Every Christian man has that. And in old days, when a baron did not

show himself at court, suspicion naturally arose, and he was in danger

of being thought disaffected, if not traitorous. Ah! if you and I were

judged according to that law, what would become of us? We can go when

we like. How seldom we do go! We can live in the heavens whilst our

work lies down here. We prefer the low earth to the lofty sky. We are

come'--ideally, and in the depths of our nature, our affinities are

there--unto God, the Judge of all, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new

Covenant.' Are we come? Are we day by day, in all the pettiness of our

ordinary lives, when compassed by hard duties, weighed upon by sore

distress--still keeping our hearts in heaven, and our feet familiar

with the path that leads us to God? Set your affection on things above,

where Jesus is, sitting at the right hand of God.' For there is no

cannot' for His servants in regard to their access to any place where

He is.

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SEEKING JESUS

. . . Ye shall seek Me.'--JOHN xiii. 33.

In the former sermon on this verse I pointed out that it, in its

fullness, applies only to the brief period between the crucifixion and

the resurrection, but that, partly by contrast and partly by analogy,

it suggests permanent relations between Christ and His disciples. These

relations were mainly--as I pointed out then--two: there was that one

expressed by the subsequent words of the verse, Whither I go, ye cannot

come'--a brief cannot,' soon to be changed into a permanent can'; and

there was a second, a brief, sad, and vain seeking, soon to be changed

into a seeking which finds. It is to the latter that I wish to turn

now.

Ye shall seek Me' fell, like the clods on a coffin-lid, with a hollow

sound on the hearts of the Apostles. It comes to us as a permission and

a command and a promise. I do not dwell on that sad seeking, which was

so brief but so bitter. We all know what it is to put out an empty hand

into the darkness and the void, and to grope for a touch which we know,

whilst we grope, that we shall not find. And these poor, helpless

disciples, by their forlorn sense of separation, by their yearning that

brought no satisfaction, by their very listless despair, were saying,

during these hours of agony into which an eternity of pain was

condensed, Oh! that He were beside us again!'

That sad seeking ended when He came to them, and then were the

disciples glad when they saw the Lord.' But another kind of seeking

began, when the cloud received Him out of their sight'; as joyful as

the other was laden with sorrow, as sure to find the object of its

quest as the other was certain to be disappointed. What He said in the

darkness to them, He says in the light to us: What I say unto you I say

unto all,' Seek! So now we have to deal with that joyful search which

is sure of finding its object, and is only a little, if at all, less

blessed than the finding itself.

I. Every Christian is, by his very name, a seeker after Christ.

There are two kinds of seeking, one like that of a bird whose young

have been stolen away, which flutters here and there, because it knows

not where that is which it seeks; another, like the flight of the same

bird, when the migrating instinct rises in its little breast, and

straight as an arrow it goes, not because it knows not its goal, but

because it knows it, yonder where the sun is warm and the sky is blue,

and winter is left behind in the cold north. Ye shall seek Me' is the

word of promise, which changes the vain search that is ignorant of

where the object of its quest is, into a blessed going out of the heart

towards that which it knows to be the home of its homelessness. Thus

the text brings out the very central blessedness and peculiarity of the

Christian life, that it has no uncertainty in its aims, and that,

instead of seeking for things which may or may not be found, or if

found may or may not prove to be what we dreamt them to be. It seeks

for a Person whom it knows where to find, and of whom it knows that all

its desires will be met in Him. We have, then, on the one side the

multifarious, divergent searchings of man; and on the other side the

one quest in which all these others are gathered up, and translated

into blessedness--the seeking after Jesus Christ.

Men know that they need, if I may so put it, four things: truth for the

understanding, love round which the heart may coil, authority for the

will which may direct and restrain, and energy for the practical life.

But, apart from the quest after Christ, men for the most part seek

these necessary goods in divers objects, and fragmentarily look for the

completion of their desires. But fragments will never satisfy a man's

soul, and they who have to go to one place for truth, and to another

for love, and to another for authority, and to another for energy, are

wofully likely never to find what they search for. They are seeking in

the manifold what can be found only in the One. It is as if some

vessel, full of precious stones, were thrown down before men, and

whilst they are racing after the diamonds, they lose the emeralds and

the sapphires. But the wise concentrate their seekings on the one Pearl

of great price,' in whom is truth for the brain, love for the heart,

authority for the will, power for the life, and all summed in that

which is more blessed than all, the Person of the Brother who died for

us, the Christ who lives to fill our hearts for ever. One sun dims all

the stars; and the one entire and perfect Chrysolite' beggars and

reduces to fragments all the precious things that thou canst desire.'

To seek Him is the very hall-mark of a Christian, and that seeking

comes to be an earnest desire and effort after more conscious communion

with Him, and a more entire possession of His imparted life which is

righteousness and peace and joy and power. According to the Rabbis, the

manna tasted to each man what each man most desired. The manifoldness

of the one Christ is far more manifold than the manifoldness of the

multiplicity of fragmentary and partial aims which foolish men

perceive.

The ways of seeking are very plain. First of all, we seek if, and in

proportion as, we make the effort to occupy our thoughts and minds, not

with theological dogmas, but with the living Christ Himself. Ah!

brethren, it is hard to do, and I daresay a great many of you are

thinking that it is far harder for you, in the distractions and rush

and conflict of business and daily life, than it is for people like me,

whom you imagine as sitting in a study, with nothing to distract us. I

do not know about that; I fancy it is about equally hard for us all;

but it is possible. I have been in Alpine villages where, at the end of

every squalid alley, there towered up a great, pure, silent, white

peak. That is what our lives may be; however noisome, crowded, petty

the little lane in which we live, the Alp is at the end of it there, if

we only choose to lift our eyes and look. It is possible that not only

into the sessions of sweet silent thought,' but into the rush and

bustle of the workshop or the exchange, there may come, like some

sweet, beguiling melody, so sweet we know not we are listening to it,'

the thought that changes pettiness into greatness, that makes all

things go smoothly and easily, that is a test and a charm to discover

and to destroy temptation, the thought of a present Christ, the Lover

of my soul, and the Helper of my life.

Again, we seek Him when, by aspiration and desire, we bring Him--as He

is always brought thereby--into our hearts and into our lives. The

measure of our desire is the measure of our possession. Wishing is the

opening of our hearts, but, alas, often we wish and desire, and the

heart opens and nothing enters. Wishes are like the tentacles of some

marine organism waving about in a waste ocean, feeling for the food

that they do not find. But if we open our hearts for Him, that is

simultaneous with the coming of Him to us. Ye have not, because ye ask

not.' Do not forget, dear friends, that desire, if it is genuine, will

take a very concrete form and will be prayer. And it is prayer--by

which I do not mean the utterance of words without desire, any more

than I mean desire without the direct casting of it into the form of

supplication--it is prayer that brings Christ into any, and it is

prayer that will bring Him into every, life.

Nor let us forget that there is another way of seeking besides these

two, of looking up to Him through, and in the midst of, all the shows

and trifles of this low life, and the reaching out of our desires

towards Him, as the roots of a tree beneath the soil go straight for

the river. That other way is imitation and obedience. It is vain to

think of Him, and it is unreal to pretend to desire Him, if we are not

seeking Him by treading in the path that He has trod, and which leads

to Him. Imitation and obedience--these are the steps by which we go

straight through all the trivialities of life into the presence of the

Lord Himself. The smallest deflection from the path that leads to Him

will carry us away into doleful wastes. The least invisible cloud that

steals across the sky will blot out half a hemisphere of stars; and we

seek not Christ unless, thinking of Him, and desiring Him, we also walk

in the path in which He has walked, and so come where He is. He Himself

has said that if His servant follows Him, where He is there shall also

His servant be. These things make up the seeking which ought to mark us

all.

I note that--

II. The Christian seeker always finds.

I pointed out in my last sermon the strange identity of our Lord's

words to His humble friends, with those which on another occasion He

used to His bitter enemies. He reminds the disciples of that identity

in the verse from which my text comes: As I said to the Jews . . . so

now I say to you.' But there was one thing that He said to the Jews

that He did not say to them. To the former He said, Ye shall seek Me,

and shall not find Me'; and He did not say that--even for the sad hours

it was not quite true--He did not say that to His followers, and He

does not say it to us.

If we seek we shall find. There is no disappointment in the Christian

life. Anything is possible rather than that a man should desire Christ

and not have Him. That has never been the experience of any seeking

soul. And so I urge upon you what has already been suggested, that

inasmuch as, by reason of His infinite longing to give truth and love

and guidance and energy and His whole Self, to all of us, the amount of

our possession of the power and life of Jesus Christ depends on

ourselves. If you take to the fountain a tiny cup, you will only bring

away a tiny cupful. If you take a great vessel you will bring it away

full. As long as the woman in the old story held out her vessels to the

miraculous flow of the oil, the flow continued. When she had no more

vessels to take, the flow stopped. If a man holds a flagon beneath a

spigot with an unsteady hand, half of the precious liquor will be spilt

on the ground. Those who fulfil the conditions, of which I have already

been speaking, may make quite sure that according to their faith will

it be unto them. And if you, dear friend, have not in your experience

the conscious presence of a Christ who is all that you need, there is

no one in heaven or earth or hell to blame for it but only your own

self. I have never said to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek ye My face in

vain'; and when the Lord said, Ye shall seek Me,' He was implicitly

binding Himself to meet the seeking soul, and give Himself to the

desiring heart.

Remember, too, that this seeking, which is always crowned with finding,

is the only search in which failure is impossible. There is only one

course of life that has no disappointments. We all know how frequently

we are foiled in our quests; we all know how often a prize won is a

bitterer disappointment than a prize unattained. Like a jelly-fish in

the water, as long as it is there its tenuous substance is lovely,

expanded, tinged with delicate violets and blues, and its long

filaments float in lines of beauty. Lay it on the beach, and it is a

shapeless lump, and it poisons and stings. You fish your prize out of

the great ocean, and when you have it, does it disappoint, or does it

fulfil, the raised expectations of the quest? There is One who does not

disappoint. There is one gold mine that comes up to the prospectus.

There is one spring that never runs dry. The more deep our Christian

experience is, the more we shall take the rapturous exclamation of the

Arabian queen to ourselves: The half was not told us!'

And so, lastly, I suggest that--

III. The finding impels to fresh seeking.

The object of the Christian man's quest is Jesus Christ. He is

Incarnate Infinitude; and that cannot be exhausted. The seeker after

Jesus Christ is the Christian soul. That soul is the incarnate

possibility of indefinite expansion and approximation and assimilation;

and that cannot be exhausted. And so, with a Christ who is infinite,

and a seeker whose capacities may be indefinitely expanded, there can

be no satiety, there can be no limit, there can be no end to the

process. This wine-skin will not burst when the new wine is put into

it. Rather like some elastic vessel, as you pour it will fill out and

expand. Possession enlarges, and the more of Christ's fullness is

poured into a human heart, the more is that heart widened out to

receive a greater blessing.

Dear brethren, there is one course of life, and I believe but one, on

which we may all enter with the sure confidence that in the nature of

things, in the nature of Christ, and in the nature of ourselves, there

is no end to growth and progress. Think of the freshness and

blessedness and energy that puts into a life. To have an unattained and

unattainable object, a goal to which we can never come, but to which we

may ever be approximating, seems to me to be the secret of perpetual

joy and of perpetual youthfulness. To say, forgetting the things that

are behind, I reach forward unto the things that are before,' is a

charm and an amulet that repels monotony and weariness, and goes with a

man to the very end, and when all other aims and objects have died down

into grey ashes, that flame, like the fabled lamp in Virgil's tomb,

burns clear in the grave, and lights us to the eternity beyond.

For certainly, if there be neither satiety nor limit to Christian

progress here, there can be no better and stronger evidence that

Christian progress here is but the first lap' of the race, the first

stadium of the course, and that beyond that narrow, dark line which

lies across the path, it runs on, rising higher, and will run on for

ever.

On earth the broken arc; in heaven the perfect round.'

Seek for what you are sure to find; seek for what will never disappoint

you; seek for what will abide with you for ever. The very first word of

Christ's recorded in Scripture is a question which He puts to us all:

What seek ye?' Well for us, if like the two to whom it was originally

addressed, we answer, We are not seeking a What; we are seeking a

Whom.--Master, where dwellest Thou?' And if we have that answer in our

hearts, we shall receive the invitation which they received, Come and

see,'--come and seek. Ye shall seek Me' is a gracious invitation, an

imperative command, and a faithful promise that if we seek we shall

find. Whoso findeth Him findeth life; whoso misseth Him'--whatever else

he has sought and found--wrongeth his own soul.'

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AS I HAVE LOVED'

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another: as I have

loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know

that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.'--JOHN xiii.

34, 35.

Wishes from dying lips are sacred. They sink deep into memories and

mould faithful lives. The sense of impending separation had added an

unwonted tenderness to our Lord's address, and He had designated His

disciples by the fond name of little children.' The same sense here

gives authority to His words, and moulds them into the shape of a

command. The disciples had held together because He was in their midst.

Will the arch stand when the keystone is struck out? Will not the

spokes fall asunder when the nave of the wheel is taken away? He would

guard them from the disintegrating tendencies that were sure to set in

when He was gone; and He would point them to a solace for His absence,

and to a kind of substitute for His presence. For to love the brethren

whom they see would be, in some sense, a continuing to love the Christ

whom they had ceased to see. And so, immediately after He said: Whither

I go ye cannot come,' He goes on to say: Love one another as I have

loved you.'

He called this a new commandment,' though to love one's neighbour as

one's self was a familiar commonplace amongst the Jews, and had a

recognised position in Rabbinical teaching. But His commandment

proposed a new object of love, it set forth a new measure of love, so

greatly different from all that had preceded it as to become almost a

new kind of love, and it suggested and supplied a new motive power for

love. This commandment could give life' and fulfil itself. Therefore it

comes to us as a new commandment'--even to us--and, unlike the words

which preceded it, which we were considering in former sermons, it is

wholly and freshly applicable to-day as in the ages that are passed. I

ask you, first, to consider--

I. The new scope of the new commandment.

Love one another.' The newness of the precept is realised, if we think

for a moment of the new phenomenon which obedience to it produced. When

the words were spoken, the then-known civilised Western world was cleft

by great, deep gulfs of separation, like the crevasses in a glacier, by

the side of which our racial animosities and class differences are

merely superficial cracks on the surface. Language, religion, national

animosities, differences of condition, and saddest of all, difference

of sex, split the world up into alien fragments. A stranger' and an

enemy' were expressed in one language, by the same word. The learned

and the unlearned, the slave and his master, the barbarian and the

Greek, the man and the woman, stood on opposite sides of the gulfs,

flinging hostility across. A Jewish peasant wandered up and down for

three years in His own little country, which was the very focus of

narrowness and separation and hostility, as the Roman historian felt

when he called the Jews the haters of the human race'; He gathered a

few disciples, and He was crucified by a contemptuous Roman governor,

who thought that the life of one fanatical Jew was a small price to pay

for popularity with his troublesome subjects, and in a generation

after, the clefts were being bridged and all over the Empire a strange

new sense of unity was being breathed, and Barbarian, Scythian, bond

and free,' male and female, Jew and Greek, learned and ignorant,

clasped hands and sat down at one table, and felt themselves all one in

Christ Jesus.' They were ready to break all other bonds, and to yield

to the uniting forces that streamed out from His Cross. There never had

been anything like it. No wonder that the world began to babble about

sorcery, and conspiracies, and complicity in unnameable vices. It was

only that the disciples were obeying the new commandment,' and a new

thing had come into the world--a community held together by love and

not by geographical accidents or linguistic affinities, or the iron

fetters of the conqueror. You sow the seed in furrows separated by

ridges, and the ground is seamed, but when the seed springs the ridges

are hidden, no division appears, and as far as the eye can reach, the

cornfield stretches, rippling in unbroken waves of gold. The new

commandment made a new thing, and the world wondered.

Now then, brethren, do not let us forget that, although to obey this

commandment is in some respects a great deal harder to-day than it was

then, the diverse circumstances in which Christian individuals and

Christian communities are this day placed may modify the form of our

obedience, but do not in the smallest degree weaken the obligation, for

the individual Christian and for societies of Christians, to follow

this commandment. The multiplication of numbers, the cessation of the

armed hostility of the world, the great varieties in intellectual

position in regard to the truths of Christianity, divergencies of

culture, and many other things, are separating forces, But our

Christianity is worth very little, if it cannot master these separating

tendencies, even as in the early days of freshness, the Christianity

that sprang in these new converts' minds mastered the far more powerful

separating tendencies with which they had to contend.

Every Christian man is under the obligation to recognise his kindred

with every other Christian man--his kindred in the deep foundations of

his spiritual being, which are far deeper, and ought to be far more

operative in drawing together, than the superficial differences of

culture or opinion or the like, which may part us. The bond that holds

Christian men together is their common relation to the one Lord, and

that ought to influence their attitude to one another. You say I am

talking commonplaces. Yes; and the condition of Christianity this day

is the sad and tragical sign that the commonplaces need to be talked

about, till they are rubbed into the conscience of the Church as they

never have been before.

Do not let us suppose that Christian love is mere sentiment. I shall

have to speak a word or two about that presently, but I would fain lift

the whole subject, if I can, out of the region of mere unctuous words

and gush of half-feigned emotion, which mean nothing, and would make

you feel that it is a very practical commandment, gripping us hard,

when our Lord says to us, Love one another.'

I have spoken about the accidental conditions which make obedience to

this commandment difficult. The real reason which makes the obedience

to it difficult is the slackness of our own hold on the Centre. In the

measure in which we are filled with Jesus Christ, in that measure will

that expression of His spirit and His life become natural to us. Every

Christian has affinities with every other Christian, in the depths of

his being, so as that he is a great deal more like his brother, who is

possessor of like precious faith,' however unlike the two may be in

outlook, in idiosyncrasy, and culture and in creed, than he is to

another man with whom he may have a far closer sympathy in all these

matters than he has with the brother in question, but from whom he is

parted by this, that the one trusts and loves and obeys Jesus Christ,

and the other does not. So, for individuals and for churches, the

commandment takes this shape--Go down to the depths and you will find

that you are closer to the Christian man or community which seems

furthest from you, than you are to the non-Christian who seems nearest

to you. Therefore, let your love follow your kinship, and your heart

recognise the oneness that knits you together. That is a revolutionary

commandment; what would become of our present organisations of

Christianity if it were obeyed? That is a revolutionary commandment;

what would become of our individual relations to the whole family who,

in every place, and in many tongues, and with many creeds, call on

Jesus as on their Lord, their Lord and ours, if it were obeyed? I leave

you to answer the question. Only I say the commandment has for its

first scope all who, in every place, love the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there is more than that involved in it. The very same principle

which makes this love to one another imperative upon all disciples,

makes it equally imperative upon every follower of Jesus Christ to

embrace in a real affection all whom Jesus so loved as to die for them.

If I am to love a Christian man because he and I love Christ, I am to

love everybody, because Christ loves me and everybody, and because He

died on the Cross for me and for all men. And so one of the other

Apostles, or, at least, the letter which goes by his name, laid hold on

the true connection when, instead of concentrating Christian affection

on the Church, and letting the world go to the devil as an alien thing,

he said: Add to your faith,' this, that, and the other, and brotherly

kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity.' The particular does not

exclude the general, it leads to the general. The fire kindled upon the

hearth gives warmth to all the chamber. The circles are concentric, and

the widest sweep is struck from the same middle point as the narrow. So

the new commandment does not cut humanity into two halves, but gathers

all diversity into one, and spreads the great reconciling of Christian

love over all the antagonisms and oppositions of earth. Let me ask you

to notice--

II. The example of the new commandment, As I have loved you.'

That solemn as' lifts itself up before us, shines far ahead of us,

ought to draw us to itself in hope, and not to repel us from itself in

despair. As I have loved'--what a tremendous thing for a man to stand

up before his fellows, and say, Take Me as the perfect example of

perfect love; and let My example--un-dimmed by the mists of gathering

centuries, and un-weakened by the change of condition, and

circumstance, fresh as ever after ages have passed, and closely-fitting

as ever all varieties of human character and condition--stand before

you; the ideal that I have realised, and you will be blessed in the

proportion in which you seek, though you fail, to realise it!' There

is, I venture to believe, only one aspect of Jesus Christ in which such

a setting forth of Himself as the perfect Incarnation of perfect love

is warrantable; and that is found in the old belief that His very birth

was the result of His love, and that His death was the climax of that

love. And if so, we have to turn to Bethlehem, and the whole life, and

the Cross at its end, as being the Christ-given example and model for

our love to our brethren.

What do we see there? I have said that there is too much of mere sickly

sentimentality about the ordinary treatment of this great commandment,

and that I desired to lift it out of that region into a far nobler,

more strenuous, and difficult one. This is what we see in that life and

in that death:--First of all--the activity of love--Let us not love in

words, but in deed and in truth'; then we see the self-forgetfulness of

love--Even Christ pleased not Himself'; then we see the self-sacrifice

of love--Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his

life for his friends.' And in these three points, on which I would fain

enlarge if I might, active love, self-oblivious love, self-sacrificing

love, you have the pattern set for us all. Christian love is no mere

sickly maiden, full of sentimental emotions and honeyed words. She is a

strenuous virgin, girt for service, a heroine ready for dangers, and

prepared to be a martyr if it be needful. Love's language is sacrifice.

I give thee myself,' is its motto. And that is the pattern that is set

before us all--as I have loved you.'

I have tried to show you how the commandment was new in many

particulars, and it is for ever new in this particular, that it is for

ever before us, unattained, and drawing faithful hearts to itself, and

ever opening out into new heroisms and, therefore, blessedness, of

self-sacrifice, and ever leading us to confess the differences, deep,

tragic, sinful, between us and Him who--we sometimes think too

presumptuously--we venture to say is our Lord and Master.

Did you ever see in some great picture gallery a copyist sitting in

front of a Raffaelle, and comparing his poor feeble daub, all out of

drawing, and with little of the divine beauty that the master had

breathed over his canvas, even if it preserved the mere mechanical

outline? That is what you and I should do with our lives: take them and

put them down side by side with the original. We shall have to do it

some day. Had we better not do it now, and try to bring the copy a

little nearer to the masterpiece; and let that as I have loved you'

shine before us and draw us on to unattainable heights?

And now, lastly, we have here--

III. The motive power for obedience to the commandment.

That is as new as all the rest. That as' expresses the manner of the

love, but it also expresses the motive and the power. It might be

translated into the equivalent in the fashion in which,' or it might be

translated into the equivalent since--' I have loved you.' The original

might bear the rendering, that ye also may love one another.' That is

to say, what keeps men from obeying this commandment is the instinctive

self-regard which is natural to us all. There are muscles in the body

which are so constructed that they close tightly; and the heart is

something like one of these sphincter muscles--it shuts by nature,

especially if there has been anything put inside it over which it can

shut and keep it all to itself. But there is one thing that dethrones

Self, and enthrones the angel Love in a heart, and that is, that into

that heart there shall come surging the sense of the great love

wherewith I have loved you.' That melts the iceberg; nothing else will.

That love of Christ to us, received into our hearts, and there

producing an answering love to Him, will make us, in the measure in

which we live in it and let it rule us, love everything and every

person that He loves. That love of Jesus Christ, stealing into our

hearts and there sweetening the ever-springing issues of life,' will

make them flow out in glad obedience to any commandment of His. That

love of Jesus Christ, received into our hearts, and responded to by our

answering love, will work, as love always does, a magical

transformation. A great monastic teacher wrote his precious book about

The Imitation of Christ. Imitation' is a great word, Transformation' is

a greater. We all,' receiving on the mirror of our loving hearts the

love of Jesus Christ, are changed into the same likeness.' Thus, then,

the love, which is our pattern, is also our motive and our power for

obedience, and the more we bring ourselves under its influences, the

more we shall love all those who are beloved by, and lovers of, Jesus.

That is the one foundation for a world knit together in the bonds of

amity and concord. There have been attempts at brotherhood, and the

guillotine has ended what was begun in the name of fraternity.' Men

build towers, but there is no cement between the bricks, unless the

love of Christ holds them together, and therefore Babel after Babel

comes down about the ears of its builders. But notwithstanding all that

is dark to-day, and though the war-clouds are lowering, and the hearts

of men are inflamed with fierce passions, Christ's commandment is

Christ's promise; and though the vision tarry, it will surely come. So

even to-day Christian men ought to stand for Christ's peace, and for

Christ's love. The old commandment which we have had from the

beginning, is the new commandment that fits to-day as it fits all the

ages. It is a dream, say some. Yes, a dream; but a morning dream which

comes true. Let us do the little we can to make it true, and to bring

about the day when the flock of men will gather round the one Shepherd,

who loved them to the death, and who has bid them and helped them to

love one another as'--and since--He has loved them.'

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QUO VADIS?

Peter said unto Him, Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now! I will lay

down my life for Thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy

life for My sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not

crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice.'--JOHN xiii. 37, 38.

Peter's main characteristics are all in operation here; his eagerness

to be in the front, his habit of blurting out his thoughts and

feelings, his passionate love for his Master, and withal his inability

to understand Him, and his self-confident arrogance. He has broken in

upon Christ's solemn words, entirely deaf to their deep meaning, but

blindly and blunderingly laying hold of one thought only, that Jesus is

departing, and that he is to be left alone. So he asks the question,

Lord! thither goest Thou?'--not so much caring about that, as meaning

by his question--tell me where, and then I will come too'; pledging

himself to follow faithfully, as a dog behind his master, wherever He

went.

Our Lord answered the underlying meaning of the words, repeating with a

personal application what He had just before said as a general

principle--Whither I go thou canst not follow Me now, but thou shall

follow Me afterwards.' Then followed this noteworthy dialogue.

The whole significance of the incident is preserved for us in the

beautiful legend which tells us how, near the city of Rome, on the

Appian Way, as Peter was flying for his life, he met the Lord, and

again said to Him: Lord, whither goest Thou?' The words of the

question, as given in the Vulgate, are the name of the site of the

supposed interview, and of the little church which stands on it. The

Master answered: I go to Rome, to be crucified again.' The answer smote

the heart of the Apostle, and turned the cowardly fugitive into a hero;

and he followed his Lord, and went gladly to his death. For it was that

death which had to be accomplished before Peter was able to follow his

Lord.

Now, as to the words before us, I think we shall best gather their

significance, and lay it upon our own hearts, if we simply follow the

windings of the dialogue. There are three points: the audacious

question, the rash vow, and the sad forecast.

I. The audacious question.

As Peter's first question, Lord, whither goest Thou?' meant not so much

what it said, as I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest; tell me,

that I may'; so the second question, in like manner, is really not so

much a question, Why cannot I follow Thee now?' as the nearest possible

approach to a flat contradiction of our Lord. Peter puts his words into

the shape of an interrogation; what he means is, Yes, I can follow

Thee; and in proof thereof, I will lay down my life for Thy sake.' The

man's persistence, the man's love leading him to lack of reverence,

came out in this (as I have ventured to call it) audacious question.

Its underlying meaning was a refusal to believe the Master's word. But

yet there was in it a nobility of resolution--broken afterwards, but

never mind about that--to endure anything rather than to be separate

from the Lord. Yet, though it was noble in its motive, but lacking in

reverence in its form, there was a deeper error than that in it. Peter

did not know what following' meant, and he had to be taught that first.

One of the main reasons why he could not follow was because he did not

understand what was involved. It was something more than marching

behind his Master, even to a Cross. There was a deeper discipline and a

more strenuous effort needed than would have availed for such a kind of

following.

Let us look a little onwards into his life. Recall that scene on the

morning of the day by the banks of the lake, when he waded through the

shallow water, and cast himself, dripping, at his Master's feet, and,

having by his threefold confession obliterated his threefold denial,

was taken back to his Lord's love, and received the permission for

which he had hungered, and which he had been told, in the upper room,

could not now' be given: Jesus said to him, Follow thou Me.' What a

flood of remembrances must then have rushed over the penitent Peter!

how he must have thought to himself, So soon, so soon is the "canst

not" changed into a canst! So soon has the "afterwards" come to be the

present!'

And long years after that, when he was an old man, and experience had

taught him what following meant, he shared his privilege with all the

dispersed strangers to whom he wrote, and said to them, with a definite

reference to this incident, and to the other after the Resurrection,

leaving us an example, that we (not only, as I used to think, in my

exuberant days of ignorance) should follow in His steps.'

So, brethren, this blundering, loving, audacious question suggests to

us that to follow Jesus Christ is the supreme direction for all

conduct. Men of all creeds, men of no creed, admit that. The

Loveliness of perfect deeds,

More strong than all poetic thought,'

which is set forth in that life constitutes the living law to which all

conduct is to be conformed, and will be noble in proportion as it is

conformed.

There is the great blessing, and solemn obligation, and lofty

prerogative of Christian morality, that for obedience to a precept it

substitutes following a Person, and instead of saying to men Be good'

it says to them Be Christlike.' It brings the conception of duty out of

the region of abstractions into the region of living realities. For the

cold statuesque ideal of perfection it substitutes a living Man, with a

heart to love, and a hand to help us. Thereby the whole aspect of

striving after the right is changed; for the work is made easier, and

companionship comes in to aid morality, when Jesus Christ says to us,

Be like Me; and then you will be good and blessed.' Effort will be all

but as blessed as attainment, and the sense of pressing hard after Him

will be only less restful than the consciousness of having attained. To

follow Him is bliss, to reach Him is heaven.

But in order that this following should be possible, there must be

something done that had not been done when Peter asked, Why cannot I

follow Thee now?' One reason why he could not was, as I said, because

he did not know yet what following' meant, and because he was yet unfit

for this assimilation of his character and of his conduct to the

likeness of his Lord. And another reason was because the Cross still

lay before the Lord, and until that death of infinite love and utter

self-sacrifice for others had been accomplished, the pattern was not

yet complete, nor the highest ideal of human life realised in life.

Therefore the following' was impossible. Christ must die before He has

completed the example that we are to follow, and Christ must die before

the impulse shall be given to us, which shall make us able to tread,

however falteringly and far behind, in His footsteps.

The essence of His life and of His death lies in the two things, entire

suppression of personal will in obedience to the will of the Father,

and entire self-sacrifice for the sake of humanity. And however there

is--and God forbid that I should ever forget in my preaching that there

is--a uniqueness in that sacrifice, in that life, and in that death,

which beggars all imitation, and needs and tolerates no repetition

whilst the world lasts, still along with this, there is that which is

imitable in the life and imitable in the death of the Master. To follow

Jesus is to live denying self for God, and to live sacrificing self for

men. Nothing less than these are included in the solemn words, leaving

us'--even in the act and article of death when He suffered for us'--an

example that we should follow His steps.'

The word rendered example' refers to the headline which the

writing-master gives his pupils to copy, line by line. We all know how

clumsy the pothooks and hangers are, how blurred the page with many a

blot. And yet there, at the top of it, stands the Master's fair

writing, and though even the last line on the page will be blotted and

blurred, when we turn it over and begin on the new leaf, the copy will

be like the original, and we shall he like Him, for we shall see Him as

He is.' Thou shalt follow Me afterwards' is a commandment; blessed be

God, it is also a promise. For let us not forget that the following'

ends in an attaining; even as the Lord Himself has said in another

connection, when He spake: If any man serve Me, let him follow Me, and

where I am, there shall also My servant be.' Of course, if we follow,

we shall come to the same place one day. And so the great promise will

be fulfilled; they shall follow the Lamb,' in that higher life,

whithersoever He goeth'; and not as here imperfectly, and far behind,

but close beside Him, and keeping step for step, being with Him first,

and following Him afterwards.

But let us remember that with regard to that future following and its

completeness, the same present incapacity applies, as clogs and mars

the following,' which is conforming our lives to His. For, as He

Himself has said to us, I go to prepare a place for you,' and until He

had passed through death and into His glory, there was no

standing-ground for human feet on the golden pavements, and heaven was

inaccessible to man until Christ had died. Thus, as all life is changed

when it is looked upon as being a following of Jesus, so death becomes

altogether other when it is so regarded. The first martyr outside the

city wall, bruised and battered by the cruel stones, remembered his

Master's death, and shaped his own to be like it. As Jesus, when He

died, had said: Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit,' Stephen,

dying, said: Lord Jesus, receive My spirit.' As the Master had given

His last breath to the prayer, Father, forgive them; they know not what

they do,' so Stephen shaped his last utterance to a conformity with his

Lord's, in which the difference is as significant as the likeness, and

said, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' And then, as the record

beautifully says, amidst all that wild hubbub and cruel assault, he

fell on sleep,' as a child on its mother's breast. Death is changed

when it becomes the following of Christ.

II. We have here a rash vow.

I will lay down my life for Thy sake.' What a strange inversion of

parts is here! Lay down thy life for My sake'--with Calvary less than

four-and-twenty hours off, when Christ laid down His life for Peter's

sake. Peter was guilty of an anachronism in the words, for the time did

not come for the disciple to die for his Lord till after the Lord had

died for His disciple. But he was right in feeling, though he felt it

only in regard to an external and physical act, that to follow Jesus,

it was necessary to be ready to die for Him. And that is the great

truth which underlies and half redeems the rashness of this vow, and

needs to be laid upon our hearts, if we are ever to be the true

followers of the Master. Death for Christ is necessary if we are to

follow Him. There is nothing that a man can do deeply and truly, in a

manner worthy of a Christian, which has not underlying it, either the

death of self-will and all the godless nature, or if need be the actual

physical death, which is a much smaller matter. You cannot follow

Christ except you die daily. No man has ever yet trodden in His

footsteps except on condition of, moment by moment, slaying self,

suppressing self, abjuring self, breaking the connection of self with

the material world, and yielding up himself as a living sacrifice, in a

living death, to the Lord of life and death. Do not think that

following Christ' is a mere sentimental expression for so much morality

as we can conveniently get into our daily life. But remember that here,

with all his rashness, with all his ignorance, with all his

superficiality, the Apostle has laid hold upon the great permanent, but

alas! much-forgotten principle, that to die is essential to following

Jesus.

This daily dying, which is a far harder thing to do than to go to a

cross once, and have done with it--was impossible for Peter then,

though he did not know it. His vow was a rash one, because the laying

down of Christ's life, for Peter's sake and for ours, had not yet been

accomplished. There is the motive-power by which, and by which alone,

drawn in gratitude, and melted down from all our selfishness, we, too,

in our measure and our turn, are able to yield ourselves, in daily

crucifixion of our evil, and daily abnegation of self-trust, and

self-pleasing, and self-will, to the Lord that has died for us. He must

lay down His life for our sakes, and we must know He has done it, and

rest upon Him as our great Sacrifice and our atoning Priest, or else we

shall never be so loosed from the tyranny of self as to be ready to

live by dying, and to die that we may live for His sake. I go to Rome

to be crucified again' were the words in which the old legend braced

the fugitive and made a hero of him, and sent him back to be crucified

like his Lord and to offer up his physical life, as he had long since

offered up his self-will and his arrogance to the Lord that had died

for him.

O Lord our Father! help us, we beseech Thee, that we may be of the

sheep that hear the Shepherd's voice and follow Him. Strengthen our

faith in that dear Lord who has laid down His life for us, that we may

daily, by self-denial and self-sacrifice, lay down our lives for Him,

and follow Him here in all the footsteps of His love.

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A RASH VOW

Jesus answered him, Wilt them lay down thy life for My sake? Verily,

verily I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied

Me thrice.'--JOHN xiii. 38.

In the last sermon I partly considered the dialogue of which this is

the concluding portion, and found that it consisted of an audacious

question: Why cannot I follow Thee now?' which really meant a

contradiction of our Lord; of a rash vow; I will lay down my life for

Thy sake'--and of a sad forecast: The cock shall not crow till thou

hast denied Me thrice.' I paused in the middle of considering the

second of these three stages, the rash vow. I then pointed out that,

however ignorant the Apostle was of what following Christ' meant, he

had hit the mark, and stumbled unknowingly upon the very essence of the

Christian life, and an eternal truth, when he recognised that, somehow

or other, to follow Christ' meant to die for Him. That is so, and is so

always, for there is no following Christ which is not a dying daily,'

by self-immolation and detachment from the world, and from the life of

sense and self. But this rash vow has to be looked at from a somewhat

different point of view, and we have to consider not only the strangely

blended right and wrong, error and deep truth, that lie in its

substance, but the strangely blended right and wrong in the state of

feeling and thought, on the part of the Apostle, which it represents.

And taking up the dropped thread, I first deal with that, and then with

the sad forecast which follows.

So then, looking at these words as being like all our words, even the

best of them, strangely mingled of right and wrong, good and evil, I

find in them--

I. A noble, sincere, but transient emotion and impulse.

I will lay down my life for Thy sake.' Peter meant it, every word of

it; and he would have done it too, if only a gibbet or cross could have

been set up then and there in the upper room. But unfortunately the

moments of elevation and high-wrought enthusiasm, and the calls to

martyrdom, do not always coincide. In the upper room, with its sacred

atmosphere, it was easy to feel, and would have been easy to do, nobly.

But it was not so easy, lying drowsily in Gethsemane, in the cold

spring night, waiting for the Master's coming out from beneath the

trembling shadows of the olive trees, or huddled up by the fire at the

lower end of the hall in the grey morning, when vitality is at its

lowest.

So the sincere, noble utterance was but the expression of impulse and

emotion which lifted Peter for a moment, and did him good, but which

likewise, running through him, left him dry, and all the weaker because

of the gush of feeling which had foamed itself away in empty words. For

let us never forget that however high, noble, or divinely inspired

emotion may be, in its nature it is transient and is sure to be

followed by reaction. Like the winter torrents in some parched land,

the more they foam, the more speedily does the bed of them dry up

again, and the more they carry down the very soil in which growth and

fertility would be possible. A rush of feeling is apt to leave behind

hard, insensitive rock. There is a close connection between a

predominantly emotional Christianity and a very imperfect life. Feeling

is apt to be a substitute for action. Is it not a very remarkable thing

that the word benevolence,' which means kindly feeling,' has come to

take on the meaning rightly belonging to beneficence,' which means

kindly doing'? The emotional man blinds and hoodwinks himself, by

thinking that his quick sensibility and lofty enthusiasm and warmth of

emotion are action or as good as action. Be thou warmed and filled,' he

says to his brother, and, in a lazy expansion of heart, forgets that he

has never lifted a finger to help.

God forbid that I should seem to deprecate emotional religion or

religious emotion! that is the last thing that needs to be done in this

generation. If the Churches want one thing more than another, it is

that their Christianity should become far more emotional than it is,

and their impulses stronger, swifter, more spontaneous, more

overmastering, and that they should be urged by these, and not merely

by the reluctant recognition that such and such a piece of sacrifice or

effort is a debt that they are obliged to clear off. Their service will

be glad service, only when it is impulsive service and emotional

service. Dear brethren, a Christian man whose life is not influenced by

the deepest and most fervid emotion of love to the great Love that died

for him, is a monster. The Lord's fire is in Jerusalem, and His furnace

in Zion'--is that a description of the fervour of this Church, or of

any Church in Christendom? A furnace? An ice-house! Think of some

deserted cottage, with the roof fallen in, and in the cold

chimney-place a rusty grate with some dead embers in it, and the snow

lying upon the top of it--that is a truer description of a great many

of our churches than the Lord's furnace.'

But the lesson to be taken from this incident before us is not the

danger of emotion; it is rather the necessity of emotion, but with two

provisoes, that it shall be emotion based upon a clear recognition of

the great truth that He has laid down His life for me; and that it

shall be emotion harnessed to work, and not wasted in words. The

mightier the plunge of the fall, the more electrical energy you can get

out of it, and set that to work to drive the wheels of life. Do not be

afraid of emotion; you will make little of your Christianity unless you

have it. But be sure that it is under the guidance of a clear

perception of the truth that evokes it, and that it is all used to turn

the wheels of life. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that

thou shouldest vow and not pay.' Better is it that emotion should be

reticent and active than that it should be voluble and idle. It is a

good servant, but a bad master. A man that trusts to impulse and

emotion to further his Christian course, is like a ship in that belt of

variable winds that lies near the Equator, where there will be a fine

ten-knot breeze for an hour or two, and then a sickly, stagnating calm.

Push further south, and get into the steady trades,' where the wind

blows with equable and persistent force all the year round in the same

direction. Convert impulses and emotions into steadfast principle,

warmed by emotion and borne on by impulse.

II. Again, this rash vow is an illustration of a confidence, also

strangely blended of good and evil.

I will lay down my life for Thy sake.' As I have said, Peter meant it.

His words are paralleled by other words, in which two of the Lord's

disciples answered His solemn question: Are ye able to drink of the cup

that I drink of?' with the unhesitating answer, We are able.' A great

teacher has regarded that saying as one of the ventures of faith.'

Perhaps it was. Perhaps there was as much self-confidence as faith in

it. Certainly there was more self-confidence than faith in Peter's

answer, and his self-confidence collapsed when the trial came.

The world and the Church hold entirely antagonistic notions about the

value of self-reliance. The world says that it is a condition of power.

The Church says that it is the root of weakness. Self-confidence shuts

a man out from the help of God, and so shuts him out from the source of

power. For if you will think for a moment, you will see that the faith

which the New Testament, in conformity with all wise knowledge of one's

self, preaches as the one secret of power, has for its obverse--its

other side--diffidence and self-distrust. No man trusts God as God

ought to be trusted, who does not distrust himself as himself ought to

be distrusted. To level a mountain is the only way to carry the water

across where it stood. You can, by mechanism and locks, take a canal up

to the top of a hill, but you cannot take a river up to the top, and

the river of God's help flows through the valley and seeks the lowest

levels. Faith and self-despair are the upper and the under sides of the

same thing, like some cunningly-woven cloth, the one side bearing a

different pattern from the other, and yet made of the same yarn, and

the same threads passing from the upper to the under sides. So faith

and self-distrust are but two names for one composite whole.

I was once shown an old Jewish coin which had on the one side the words

sackcloth and ashes,' and on the other side the words a crown of gold.'

The coin meant to contrast what Israel had been with what Israel then

was. The crown had come first; the sackcloth and ashes last. But we may

use it for illustrating this point, on which I am now dwelling.

Wherever, and only where, there are the sackcloth and ashes of

self-despair there will be the crown of gold of an answering faith.

When thus, as Wesley has it, in his great hymn: Confident in

self-despair,' we cling to God, then we can say: When I am weak then am

I strong,' Behold! we have no might, but our eyes are upon Thee.' If

Peter had only said, By Thy help I will lay down my life for Thy sake,'

his confidence would have been reasonable and blessed self-confidence,

because it would have been confidence in a self inspired by divine

power.

And so, brethren, whilst utter diffidence is right for us, and is the

condition of all our reception of energy according to our need, the

most absolute confidence--a confidence which, to the eye of the man

that measures only visible things, will seem sheer insanity--is

sobriety for a Christian. The world is perfectly right when it says: If

you believe you can do a thing, you have gone a long way towards doing

it.' The expectation of success has often the knack of fulfilling

itself. But the world does not know our secret, and our secret is that

our humble faith brings into the field the reserves with the Captain of

our salvation at their head. Therefore a self-distrusting Christian can

say, and say without exaggeration or presumption, I can do all things

in Christ, strengthening me from within.'

The Church's ideals are possibilities, when you bring God into the

account, and they look like insanity when you do not. Take, for

instance, missions. What an absurdity to talk about a handful of

Christian people--for we are only a handful as compared with the whole

world--carrying their Gospel into every corner of the earth, and

finding everywhere a response to it. Yes; it is absurd; but, wise Mr.

Calculator, counter of heads, you have forgotten God in your estimate

of whether it is reasonable or unreasonable. Again, take the Christian

ideal of absolute perfection of character. What nonsense to talk as if

any man could ever come to that.' Yes!--as if any man could come to

that, I grant you. But if God is with him, the nonsense is to suppose

that he will not come to it. Here is a row of cyphers as long as your

arm. They mean nothing. Put a 1 at the left-hand end of the row; and

what does it mean then? So the faith that brings Christ into the life,

and into the Church, makes nobodies' into mighty men--laughs at

impossibilities, and cries, It shall be done!'

Still further, here, in this rash vow, we have an underestimate of

difficulties. There was another incident in the life of the Apostle, a

strange replica of this one, into which he pushed himself, just as he

did into the high priest's hall, partly out of curiosity and a wish to

be prominent; partly out of love to his Master. Without a moment's

consideration of the peril into which he was thrusting himself, he sat

in the boat, and said, Bid me come to Thee on the water.' He forgot

that He was heavy, and that water was not solid, and that the wind was

high and the lake rough, and when he put his foot over the side and

felt the cold waves creeping up his knees, his courage ebbed out with

his faith, and he began to sink. Then he cried, Lord! help me!' If he

had thought for a moment of the reality of the case, he would have sat

still in the boat. If he had thought of what would be in his way in

following Jesus to death, he would have hesitated to vow. But it is so

much easier to resolve heroisms in a quiet corner than to do them when

the strain comes, and it is so much easier to do some one great thing

that has in it enthusiasm and nobility, and conspicuousness of

sacrifice, especially if it can be got over in a moment, like having

one's head cut off with an axe, than it is to die daily.' Ah! brethren,

it is the little difficulties that make the difficulty. You read in the

newspapers in the autumn, every now and then, of trains, in that

wonderful country across the water, being stopped by caterpillars. The

Christian train is stopped by an army of caterpillars, far oftener than

it is by some solid and towering barrier. Our Christian lives are a

great deal likelier to come to failure, because we do not take into

account the multiplied small antagonisms than because we are not ready

to face the greater ones. What would you think of a bridge builder, who

built a bridge across some mountain torrent and made no allowance for

freshets and floods when the ice melted? His bridge and his piers would

be gone the first winter. You remember who it was that said that he

went into the Franco-German War with a light heart,' and in seven weeks

came Sedan and the dethronement of an Emperor, and the surrender of an

army. Blessed is he that feareth always.' There is no more fatal error

than an underestimate of our difficulties.

III. Let me say a word about the sad forecast here.

Thou shalt deny me thrice.'

We cannot say that poor Peter's fall was at all an anomalous or

uncommon thing. He did exactly what a great many of us are doing. He

could--and I have no doubt he would--have gone to the death for Jesus

Christ; but he could not stand being laughed at for Him. He would have

been ready to meet the executioner's sharp sword, but the

servant-girl's sharp tongue was more than he could bear. And so he

denied Jesus, not because he was afraid of his skin--for I do not

suppose that the servants had any notion of doing anything more than

amusing themselves with a few clumsy gibes at his expense--but because

he could not bear to be made sport of.

Now, dear brethren, I suppose we are all of us more or less movers in

circles in which it sometimes is not considered good form' to show that

we are Christian people. You young men in your warehouses, you students

at the University, where it is a sign of being fossils' and behind the

times' and not up to date' to say I am a Christian,' and all of us in

our several places have sometimes to gather our courage together, and

not be afraid to declare whose we are. No doubt life is a better

witness than words, but no doubt also life is not so good a witness as

it might be, unless it sometimes has the commentary of words as well.

Thus, to confess Christ means two things; to say sometimes--in the face

of a smile of scorn, which is often harder to bear than something much

more dangerous--I am His,' and to live Christ, and to say by conduct I

am His,' Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess

before My Father, and whosoever shall deny Me, him will I also deny.'

Do not button your coats over your uniform. Do not take the cockade out

of your hats when you go amongst the other side.' Live Jesus, and, when

advisable, preach Jesus.

But Peter's fall, which is typical of what we are all tempted to do,

has in it a gracious message; for it proclaims the possibility of

recovery from any depth of descent, and of coming back again from any

distance of wandering. Did you ever notice how Peter's fall was burnt

in upon his memory, so as that when he began to preach after Pentecost,

the shape that his indictment of his hearers takes is, Ye denied the

Holy One and the Just,' and how, long after--if the second Epistle

which goes by his name is his--in summing up the crimes of the heretics

whom he is branding, he speaks of their denying the Lord that bought

them.' He never forgot his denial, and it remained with him as the

expression for all that was wrong in a man's relation to Jesus Christ.

And I suppose not only was it burnt in upon his memory, but it burnt

out all his self-confidence.

It is beautiful to see how, in his letter, he speaks over and over

again of fear' as being a wise temper of mind for a Christian. As

George Herbert has it, A sad, wise valour is the true complexion.' Thus

the man that had been so confident in himself learned to say Be ready

to give to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in

you, with meekness and fear.'

And do you not think that his fall drew him closer to Jesus Christ than

ever he had been before, as he learned more of His pardoning love and

mercy? Was he not nearer the Lord on that morning when the two

together, alone, talked after the Resurrection? Was he not nearer Him

when he struggled to his feet from the boat on the lake, on that

morning when he was received back into his office as Christ's Apostle?

Did he ever forget how he had sinned? Did he ever forget how Christ had

pardoned? Did he ever forget how Christ loved and would keep him? Ah,

no! The rope that is broken is strongest where it is spliced, not

because it was broken, but because a cunning hand has strengthened it.

We may be the stronger for our sins, not because sin strengthens, for

it weakens, but because God restores. It is possible that we may build

a fairer structure on the ruins of our old selves. It is possible that

we may turn every field of defeat into a field of victory. It is

possible that we may

Fall to rise; be beaten, to fight better.'

If only we cling to the Lord our Strength, the promise shall be

ours--whatever our failures, denials, backslidings, inconsistencies--

though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord

upholdeth him with His hand.'

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FAITH IN GOD AND CHRIST

Let not your heart be troubled . . . believe in God, believe also in

Me.'--JOHN xiv. 1.

The twelve were sitting in the upper chamber, stupefied with the

dreary, half-understood prospect of Christ's departure. He, forgetting

His own burden, turns to comfort and encourage them. These sweet and

great words most singularly blend gentleness and dignity. Who can

reproduce the cadence of soothing tenderness, soft as a mother's hand,

in that Let not your heart be troubled'? And who can fail to feel the

tone of majesty in that Believe in God, believe also in Me'?

The Greek presents an ambiguity in the latter half of the verse, for

the verb may be either indicative or imperative, and so we may read

four different ways, according as we render each of the two believes'

in either of these two fashions. Our Authorised and Revised Versions

concur in adopting the indicative Ye believe' in the former clause and

the imperative in the latter. But I venture to think that we get a more

true and appropriate meaning if we keep both clauses in the same mood,

and read them both as imperatives: Believe in God, believe also in Me.'

It would be harsh, I think, to take one as an affirmation and the other

as a command. It would be irrelevant, I think, to remind the disciples

of their belief in God. It would break the unity of the verse and

destroy the relation of the latter half to the former, the former being

a negative precept: Let not your heart be troubled'; and the latter

being a positive one: Instead of being troubled, believe in God, and

believe in Me.' So, for all these reasons, I venture to adopt the

reading I have indicated.

I. Now in these words the first thing that strikes me is that Christ

here points to Himself as the object of precisely the same religious

trust which is to be given to God.

It is only our familiarity with these words that blinds us to their

wonderfulness and their greatness. Try to hear them for the first time,

and to bring into remembrance the circumstances in which they were

spoken. Here is a man sitting among a handful of His friends, who is

within four-and-twenty hours of a shameful death, which to all

appearance was the utter annihilation of all His claims and hopes, and

He says, Trust in God, and trust in Me'! I think that if we had heard

that for the first time, we should have understood a little better than

some of us do the depth of its meaning.

What is it that Christ asks for here? Or rather let me say, What is it

that Christ offers to us here? For we must not look at the words as a

demand or as a command, but rather as a merciful invitation to do what

it is life and blessing to do. It is a very low and inadequate

interpretation of these words which takes them as meaning little more

than Believe in God, believe that He is; believe in Me, believe that I

am.' But it is scarcely less so to suppose that the mere assent of the

understanding to His teaching is all that Christ is asking for here. By

no means; what He invites us to goes a great deal deeper than that. The

essence of it is an act of the will and of the heart, not of the

understanding at all. A man may believe in Him as a historical person,

may accept all that is said about Him here, and yet not be within sight

of the trust in Him of which He here speaks. For the essence of the

whole is not the intellectual process of assent to a proposition, but

the intensely personal act of yielding up will and heart to a living

person. Faith does not grasp a doctrine, but a heart. The trust which

Christ requires is the bond that unites souls with Him; and the very

life of it is entire committal of myself to Him in all my relations and

for all my needs, and absolute utter confidence in Him as

all-sufficient for everything that I can require. Let us get away from

the cold intellectualism of belief' into the warm atmosphere of trust,'

and we shall understand better than by many volumes what Christ here

means and the sphere and the power and the blessedness of that faith

which Christ requires.

Further, note that, whatever may be this believing in Him which He asks

from us or invites us to render, it is precisely the same thing which

He bids us render to God. The two clauses in the original bring out

that idea even more vividly than in our version, because the order of

the words in the latter clause is inverted; and they read literally

thus: Believe in God, in Me also believe.' The purpose of the inversion

is to put these two, God and Christ, as close together as possible; and

to put the two identical emotions at the beginning and at the end, at

the two extremes and outsides of the whole sentence. Could language be

more deliberately adopted and moulded, even in its consecution and

arrangement, to enforce this thought, that whatever it is that we give

to Christ, it is the very same thing that we give to God? And so He

here proposes Himself as the worthy and adequate recipient of all these

emotions of confidence, submission, resignation, which make up religion

in its deepest sense.

That tone is by no means singular in this place. It is the uniform tone

and characteristic of our Lord's teaching. Let me remind you just in a

sentence of one or two instances. What did He think of Himself who

stood up before the world and, with arms outstretched, like that great

white Christ in Thorwaldsen's lovely statue, said to all the troop of

languid and burdened and fatigued ones crowding at His feet: Come unto

Me all ye that are weary and are heavy laden, and I will give you

rest'? That surely is a divine prerogative. What did He think of

Himself who said, All men should honour the Son even as they honour the

Father'? What did He think of Himself who, in that very Sermon on the

Mount (to which the advocates of a maimed and mutilated Christianity

tell us they pin their faith, instead of to mystical doctrines)

declared that He Himself was the Judge of humanity, and that all men

should stand at His bar and receive from Him according to the deeds

done in their body'? Upon any honest principle of interpreting these

Gospels, and unless you avowedly go picking and choosing amongst His

words, accepting this and rejecting that, you cannot eliminate from the

scriptural representation of Jesus Christ the fact that He claimed as

His own the emotions of the heart to which only God has a right and

only God can satisfy.

I do not dwell upon that point, but I say, in one sentence, we have to

take that into account if we would estimate the character of Jesus

Christ as a Teacher and as a Man. I would not turn away from Him any

imperfect conceptions, as they seem to me, of His nature and His

work--rather would I foster them, and lead them on to a fuller

recognition of the full Christ--but this I am bound to say, that for my

part I believe that nothing but the wildest caprice, dealing with the

Gospels according to one's own subjective fancies, irrespective

altogether of the evidence, can strike out from the teaching of Christ

this its characteristic difference. What signalises Him, and separates

Him from all other religious teachers, is not the clearness or the

tenderness with which He reiterated the truths about the divine

Father's love, or about morality, and justice, and truth, and goodness;

but the peculiarity of His call to the world is, Believe in Me.' And if

He said that, or anything like it, and if the representations of His

teaching in these four Gospels, which are the only source from which we

get any notion of Him at all, are to be accepted, why, then, one of two

things follows. Either He was wrong, and then He was a crazy

enthusiast, only acquitted of blasphemy because convicted of insanity;

or else--or else--He was God, manifest in the flesh.' It is vain to bow

down before a fancy portrait of a bit of Christ, and to exalt the

humble sage of Nazareth, and to leave out the very thing that makes the

difference between Him and all others, namely, these either audacious

or most true claims to be the Son of God, the worthy Recipient and the

adequate Object of man's religious emotions. Believe in God, in Me also

believe.'

II. Now, secondly, notice that faith in Christ and faith in God are not

two, but one.

These two clauses on the surface present juxtaposition. Looked at more

closely they present interpenetration and identity. Jesus Christ does

not merely set Himself up by the side of God, nor are we worshippers of

two Gods when we bow before Jesus and bow before the Father; but faith

in Christ is faith in God, and faith in God which is not faith in

Christ is imperfect, incomplete, and will not long last. To trust in

Him is to trust in the Father; to trust in the Father is to trust in

Him.

What is the underlying truth that is here? How comes it that these two

objects blend into one, like two figures in a stereoscope; and that the

faith which flows to Jesus Christ rests upon God? This is the

underlying truth, that Jesus Christ, Himself divine, is the divine

Revealer of God. I need not dwell upon the latter of these two

thoughts: how there is no real knowledge of the real God in the depth

of His love, the tenderness of His nature or the lustrousness of His

holiness; how there is no certitude; how the God that we see outside of

Jesus Christ is sometimes doubt, sometimes hope, sometimes fear, always

far-off and vague, an abstraction rather than a person, a stream of

tendency' without us, that which is unnameable, and the like. I need

not dwell upon the thought that Jesus Christ has showed us a Father,

has brought a God to our hearts whom we can love, whom we can know

really though not fully, of whom we can be sure with a certitude which

is as deep as the certitude of our own personal being; that He has

brought to us a God before whom we do not need to crouch far off, that

He has brought to us a God whom we can trust. Very significant is it

that Christianity alone puts the very heart of religion in the act of

trust. Other religions put it in dread, worship, service, and the like.

Jesus Christ alone says, the bond between men and God is that blessed

one of trust. And He says so because He alone brings us a God whom it

is not ridiculous to tell men to trust.

And, on the other hand, the truth that underlies this is not only that

Jesus Christ is the Revealer of God, but that He Himself is divine.

Light shines through a window, but the light and the glass that makes

it visible have nothing in common with one another. The Godhead shines

through Christ, but He is not a mere transparent medium. It is Himself

that He is showing us when He is showing us God. He that hath seen Me

hath seen'--not the light that streams through Me--but hath seen,' in

Me, the Father.' And because He is Himself divine and the divine

Revealer, therefore the faith that grasps Him is inseparably one with

the faith that grasps God. Men could look upon a Moses, an Isaiah, or a

Paul, and in them recognise the eradiation of the divinity that

imparted itself through them, but the medium was forgotten in

proportion as that which it revealed was beheld. You cannot forget

Christ in order to see God more clearly, but to behold Him is to behold

God.

And if that be true, these two things follow. One is that all imperfect

revelation of God is prophetic of, and leads up towards, the perfect

revelation in Jesus Christ. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews

gives that truth in a very striking fashion. He compares all other

means of knowing God to fragmentary syllables of a great word, of which

one was given to one man and another to another. God spoke at sundry

times and in manifold portions to the fathers by the prophets'; but the

whole word is articulately uttered by the Son, in whom He has spoken

unto us in these last times.' The imperfect revelation, by means of

those who were merely mediums for the revelation leads up to Him who is

Himself the Revelation, the Revealer, and the Revealed.

And in like manner, all the imperfect faith that, laying hold of other

fragmentary means of knowing God, has tremulously tried to trust Him,

finds its climax and consummate flower in the full-blossomed faith that

lays hold upon Jesus Christ. The unconscious prophecies of heathendom;

the trust that select souls up and down the world have put in One whom

they dimly apprehended; the faith of the Old Testament saints; the

rudimentary beginnings of a knowledge of God and of a trust in Him

which are found in men to-day, and amongst us, outside of the circle of

Christianity--all these things are as manifestly incomplete as a

building reared half its height, and waiting for the corner-stone to be

brought forth, the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and the

intelligent and full acceptance of Him and faith in Him.

And another thing is true, that without faith in Christ such faith in

God as is possible is feeble, incomplete, and will not long last.

Historically a pure theism is all but impotent. There is only one

example of it on a large scale in the world, and that is a kind of

bastard Christianity--Mohammedanism; and we all know what good that is

as a religion. There are plenty of people amongst us nowadays who claim

to be very advanced thinkers, and who call themselves Theists, and not

Christians. Well, I venture to say that that is a phase that will not

last. There is little substance in it. The God whom men know outside of

Jesus Christ is a poor, nebulous thing; an idea, not a reality. He, or

rather It, is a film of cloud shaped into a vague form, through which

you can see the stars. It has little power to restrain. It has less to

inspire and impel. It has still less to comfort; it has least of all to

satisfy the heart. You will have to get something more substantial than

the far-off god of an unchristian Theism if you mean to sway the world

and to satisfy men's hearts.

And so, dear brethren, I come to this--perhaps the word may be fitting

for some that listen to me--Believe in God,' and that you may, believe

also in Christ.' For sure I am that when the stress comes, and you want

a god, unless your god is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, he will be

a powerless deity. If you have not faith in Christ, you will not long

have faith in God that is vital and worth anything.

III. Lastly, this trust in Christ is the secret of a quiet heart.

It is of no use to say to men, Let not your hearts be troubled,' unless

you finish the verse and say, Believe in God, believe also in Christ.'

For unless we trust we shall certainly be troubled. The state of man in

this world is like that of some of those sunny islands in southern

seas, around which there often rave the wildest cyclones, and which

carry in their bosoms, beneath all their riotous luxuriance of verdant

beauty, hidden fires, which ever and anon shake the solid earth and

spread destruction. Storms without and earthquakes within--that is the

condition of humanity. And where is the rest' to come from? All other

defences are weak and poor. We have heard about pills against

earthquakes.' That is what the comforts and tranquillising which the

world supplies may fairly be likened to. Unless we trust we are, and we

shall be, and should be, troubled.'

If we trust we may be quiet. Trust is always tranquillity. To cast a

burden off myself on others' shoulders is always a rest. But trust in

Jesus Christ brings infinitude on my side. Submission is repose. When

we cease to kick against the pricks they cease to prick and wound us.

Trust opens the heart, like the windows of the Ark tossing upon the

black and fatal flood, for the entrance of the peaceful dove with the

olive branch in its mouth. Trust brings Christ to my side in all His

tenderness and greatness and sweetness. If I trust, all is right that

seems most wrong.' If I trust, conscience is quiet. If I trust, life

becomes a solemn scorn of ills.' If I trust, inward unrest is changed

into tranquillity, and mad passions are cast out from him that sits

clothed and in his right mind' at the feet of Jesus.

The wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest.' But if I trust,

my soul will become like the glassy ocean when all the storms sleep,

and birds of peace sit brooding on the charmed wave.' Peace I leave

with you.' Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in

Me.'

Help us, O Lord! to yield our hearts to Thy dear Son, and in Him to

find Thyself and eternal rest.

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MANY MANSIONS'

In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have

told you.'--JOHN xiv. 2.

Sorrow needs simple words for its consolation; and simple words are the

best clothing for the largest truths. These eleven poor men were

crushed and desolate at the thought of Christ's going; they fancied

that if He left them they lost Him. And so, in simple, childlike words,

which the weakest could grasp, and in which the most troubled could

find peace, He said to them, after having encouraged their trust in

Him, There is plenty of room for you as well as for Me where I am

going; and the frankness of our intercourse in the past might make you

sure that if I were going to leave you I would have told you all about

it. Did I ever hide from you anything that was painful? Did I ever

allure you to follow Me by false promises? Should I have kept silence

about it if our separation was to be eternal?' So, simply, as a mother

might hush her babe upon her breast, He soothes their sorrow. And yet,

in the quiet words, so level to the lowest apprehension, there lie

great truths, far deeper than we yet have appreciated, and which will

enfold themselves in their majesty and their greatness through

eternity. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I

would have told you.'

I. Now note in these words, first, the Father's house,' and its ample

room.

There is only one other occasion recorded in which our Lord used this

expression, and it occurs in this same Gospel near the beginning; where

in the narrative of the first cleansing of the Temple we read that He

said, Make not My Father's house a house of merchandise.' The earlier

use of the words may help to throw light upon one aspect of this latter

employment of it, for there blend in the image the two ideas of what I

may call domestic familiarity, and of that great future as being the

reality of which the earthly Temple was intended to be the dim prophecy

and shadow. Its courts, its many chambers, its ample porches with room

for thronging worshippers, represented in some poor way the wide sweep

and space of that higher house; and the sense of Sonship, which drew

the Boy to His Father's house in the earliest hours of conscious

childhood, speaks here.

Think for a moment of how sweet and familiar the conception of heaven

as the Father's house makes it to us. There is something awful, even to

the best and holiest souls, in the thought of even the glories beyond.

The circumstances of death, which is its portal, our utter

unacquaintance with all that lies behind the veil, the terrible silence

and distance which falls upon our dearest ones as they are sucked into

the cloud, all tend to make us feel that there is much that is solemn

and awful even in the thought of eternal future blessedness. But how it

is all softened when we say, My Father's house.' Most of us have long

since left behind us the sweet security, the sense of the absence of

all responsibility, the assurance of defence and provision, which used

to be ours when we lived as children in a father's house here. But we

may all look forward to the renewal, in far nobler form, of these early

days, when the father's house meant the inexpugnable fortress where no

evil could befall us, the abundant home where all wants were supplied,

and where the shyest and timidest child could feel at ease and secure.

It is all coming again, brother, and amidst the august and unimaginable

glories of that future the old feeling of being little children,

nestling safe in the Father's house, will fill our quiet hearts once

more.

And then consider how the conception of that Future as the Father's

house suggests answers to so many of our questions about the

relationship of the inmates to one another. Are they to dwell isolated

in their several mansions? Is that the way in which children in a home

dwell with each other? Surely if He be the Father, and heaven be His

house, the relation of the redeemed to one another must have in it more

than all the sweet familiarity and unrestrained frankness which

subsists in the families of earth. A solitary heaven would be but half

a heaven, and would ill correspond with the hopes that inevitably

spring from the representation of it as my Father's house.'

But consider further that this great and tender name for heaven has its

deepest meaning in the conception of it as a spiritual state of which

the essential elements are the loving manifestation and presence of God

as Father, the perfect consciousness of sonship, the happy union of all

the children in one great family, and the derivation of all their

blessedness from their Elder Brother.

The earthly Temple, to which there is some allusion in this great

metaphor, was the place in which the divine glory was manifested to

seeking souls, though in symbol, yet also in reality, and the

representation of our text blends the two ideas of the free, frank

intercourse of the home and of the magnificent revelations of the Holy

of holies. Under either aspect of the phrase, whether we think of my

Father's house' as temple or as home, it sets before us, as the main

blessedness and glory of heaven, the vision of the Father, the

consciousness of sonship, and the complete union with Him. There are

many subsidiary and more outward blessednesses and glories which shine

dimly through the haze of metaphors and negations, by which alone a

state of which we have no experience can be revealed to us; but these

are secondary. The heaven of heaven is the possession of God the Father

through the Son in the expanding spirits of His sons. The sovereign and

filial position which Jesus Christ in His manhood occupies in that

higher house, and which He shares with all those who by Him have

received the adoption of sons, is the very heart and nerve of this

great metaphor.

But I think we must go a step further than that, and recognise that in

the image there is inherent the teaching that that glorious future is

not merely a state, but also a place. Local associations are not to be

divorced from the words; and although we can say but little about such

a matter, yet everything in the teaching of Scripture points to the

thought that howsoever true it may be that the essence of heaven is

condition, yet that also heaven has a local habitation, and is a place

in the great universe of God. Jesus Christ has at this moment a human

body, glorified. That body, as Scripture teaches us, is somewhere, and

where He is there shall also His servant be. In the context He goes on

to tell us that He goes to prepare a place for us,' and though I would

not insist upon the literal interpretation of such words, yet

distinctly the drift of the representation is in the direction of

localising, though not of materialising, the abode of the blessed. So I

think we can say, not merely that what He is that shall also His

servants be, but that where He is there shall also His servants be. And

from the representation of my text, though we cannot fathom all its

depths, we can at least grasp this, which gives solidity and reality to

our contemplations of the future, that heaven is a place, full of all

sweet security and homelike repose, where God is made known in every

heart and to every consciousness as a loving Father, and of which all

the inhabitants are knit together in the frankest fraternal

intercourse, conscious of the Father's love, and rejoicing in the

abundant provisions of His royal House.

And then there is a second thought to be suggested from these words,

and that is of the ample room in this great house. The original purpose

of the words of my text, as I have already reminded you, was simply to

soothe the fears of a handful of disciples.

There was room where Christ went for eleven poor men. Yes, room enough

for them! but Christ's prescient eye looked down the ages, and saw all

the unborn millions that would yet be drawn to Him uplifted on the

Cross, and some glow of satisfaction flitted across His sorrow, as He

saw from afar the result of the impending travail of His soul in the

multitudes by whom God's heavenly house should yet be filled. Many

mansions!' the thought widens out far beyond our grasp. Perhaps that

upper room, like most of the roof-chambers in Jewish houses, was open

to the skies, and whilst He spoke, the innumerable lights that blaze in

that clear heaven shone down upon them, and He may have pointed to

these. The better Abraham perhaps looked forth, like His prototype, on

the starry heavens, and saw in the vision of the future those who

through Him should receive the adoption of sons' and dwell for ever in

the house of the Lord, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude,

and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable.'

Ah! brethren, if we could only widen our measurement of the walls of

the New Jerusalem to the measurement of that golden rod which the man,

that is the angel,' as John says, applied to it, we should understand

how much bigger it is than any of these poor sects and communities of

ours here on earth. If we would lay to heart, as we ought to do, the

deep meaning of that indefinite many' in my text, it would rebuke our

narrowness. There will be a great many occupants of the mansions in

heaven that Christian men here on earth--the most Catholic of

them--will be very much surprised to see there, and thousands will find

their entrance there that never found their entrance into any

communities of so-called Christians here on earth.

That one word many' should deepen our confidence in the triumphs of

Christ's Cross, and it may be used to heighten our own confidence as to

our own poor selves. A chamber in the great Temple waits for each of

us, and the question is, Shall we occupy it, or shall we not? The old

Rabbis had a tradition which, like a great many of their apparently

foolish sayings, covers in picturesque guise a very deep truth. They

said that, however many the throngs of worshippers who came up to

Jerusalem at the passover, the streets of the city and the courts of

the sanctuary were never crowded. And so it is with that great city.

There is room for all. There are throngs, but no crowds. Each finds a

place in the ample sweep of the Father's house, like some of the great

palaces that barbaric Eastern kings used to build, in whose courts

armies might encamp, and the chambers of which were counted by the

thousand. And surely in all that ample accommodation, you and I may

find some corner where we, if we will, may lodge for evermore.

I do not dwell upon subsidiary ideas that may be drawn from the

expressions. Mansions' means places of permanent abode, and suggests

the two thoughts, so sweet to travellers and toilers in this fleeting,

labouring life, of unchangeableness and of repose. Some have supposed

that the variety in the attainments of the redeemed, which is

reasonable and scriptural, might be deduced from our text, but that

does not seem to be relevant to our Lord's purpose.

One other suggestion may be made without enlarging upon it. There is

only one other occasion in this Gospel in which the word here

translated mansions' is employed, and it is this: We will come and make

our abode with him.' Our mansion is in God; God's dwelling-place is in

us. So ask yourselves, Have you a place in that heavenly home? When

prodigal children go away from the father's house, sometimes a

broken-hearted parent will keep the boy's room just as it used to be

when he was young and pure, and will hope and weary through long days

for him to come back and occupy it again. God is keeping a room for you

in His house; do you see that you fill it.

II. In the next place, note here the sufficiency of Christ's revelation

for our needs.

If it were not so I would have told you.' He sets Himself forward in

very august fashion as being the Revealer and Opener of that house for

us. There is a singular tone about all our Lord's few references to the

future--a tone of decisiveness; not as if He were speaking, as a man

might do, that which he had thought out, or which had come to him, but

as if He was speaking of what he had Himself beheld, We speak that we

do know, and testify that we have seen.' He stands like one on a

mountain top, looking down into the valleys beyond, and telling His

comrades in the plain behind Him what He sees. He speaks of that unseen

world always as One who had been in it, and who was reporting

experiences, and not giving forth opinions. His knowledge was the

knowledge of One who dwelt with the Father, and left the house in order

to find and bring back His wandering brethren. It was His own calm

home, His habitation from eternity,' and therefore He could tell us

with decisiveness, with simplicity, with assurance, all which we need

to know about the geography of that unknown land--the plan of that, by

us unvisited, house. Very remarkable, therefore, is it, that with this

tone there should be such reticence in Christ's references to the

future. The text implies the rationale of such reticence. If it were

not so I would have told you.' I tell you all that you need, though I

tell you a great deal less than you sometimes wish.

The gaps in our knowledge of the future, seeing that we have such a

Revealer as we have in Christ, are remarkable. But my text suggests

this to us--we have as much as we need. I know, and many of you know,

by bitter experience, how many questions, the answers to which would

seem to us to be such a lightening of our burdens, our desolated and

troubled hearts suggest about that future, and how vainly we ply heaven

with questions and interrogate the unreplying Oracle. But we know as

much as we need. We know that God is there. We know that it is the

Father's house. We know that Christ is in it. We know that the dwellers

there are a family. We know that sweet security and ample provision are

there; and, for the rest, if we I needed to have heard more, He would

have told us.

My knowledge of that life is small,

The eye of faith is dim;

But tis enough that Christ knows all;

And I shall be with Him.'

Let the gaps remain. The gaps are part of the revelation, and we know

enough for faith and hope.

May we not widen the application of that thought to other matters than

to our bounded and fragmentary conceptions of a future life? In times

like the present, of doubt and unrest, it is a great piece of Christian

wisdom to recognise the limitations of our knowledge and the

sufficiency of the fragments that we have. What do we get a revelation

for? To solve theological puzzles and dogmatic difficulties? to inflate

us with the pride of quasi-omniscience? or to present to us God in

Christ for faith, for love, for obedience, for imitation? Surely the

latter, and for such purposes we have enough.

So let us recognise that our knowledge is very partial. A great stretch

of wall is blank, and there is not a window in it. If there had been

need for one, it would have been struck out. He has been pleased to

leave many things obscure, not arbitrarily, so as to try our faith--for

the implication of the words before us is that the relation between Him

and us binds Him to the utmost possible frankness, and that all which

we need and He can tell us He does tell--but for high reasons, and

because of the very conditions of our present environment, which forbid

the more complete and all-round knowledge.

So let us recognise our limitations. We know in part, and we are wise

if we affirm in part. Hold by the Central Light, which is Jesus Christ.

Many things did Jesus which are not written in this book,' and many

gaps and deficiencies from a human point of view exist in the

contexture of revelation. But these are written that ye may believe

that Jesus is the Christ,' for which enough has been told us, and that,

believing, ye may have life in His name.' If that purpose be

accomplished in us, God will not have spoken, nor we have heard, in

vain. Let us hold by the Central Light, and then the circumference of

darkness will gradually retreat, and a wider sphere of illumination be

ours, until the day when we enter our mansion in the Father's house,

and then in Thy Light shall we see light'; and we shall know even as we

are known.'

Let your Elder Brother lead you back, dear friend, to the Father's

bosom, and be sure that if you trust Him and listen to Him, you will

know enough on earth to turn earth into a foretaste of Heaven, and will

find at last your place in the Father's house beside the Brother who

has prepared it for you.

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THE FORERUNNER

. . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place

for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I

am, there ye may be also.'--JOHN xiv. 2, 3.

What divine simplicity and depth are in these words! They carry us up

into the unseen world, and beyond time; and yet a little child can lay

hold on them, and mourning hearts and dying men find peace and

sweetness in them. A very familiar image underlies them. It was

customary for travellers in those old days to send some of their party

on in advance, to find lodging and make arrangements for them in some

great city. Many a time one or other of the disciples had been sent

before His face into every place where He Himself should come.' On that

very morning two of them had gone in, at His bidding, from Bethany to

make ready the table at which they were sitting. Christ here takes that

office upon Himself. The emblem is homely, the thing meant is

transcendent.

Not less wonderful is the blending of majesty and lowliness. The office

which He takes upon Himself is that of an inferior and a servant. And

yet the discharge of it, in the present case, implies His authority

over every corner of the universe, His immortal life, and the

sufficiency of His presence to make a heaven. Nor can we fail to notice

the blending of another pair of opposites: His certainty of His

impending death, and His certainty, notwithstanding and thereby, of His

continual work and His final return, are inseparably interlaced here.

How comes it that, in all His premonitions of His death, Jesus Christ

never spoke about it as failure or as the interruption or end of His

activity, but always as the transition to, and the condition of, His

wider work? I go, and if I go I return, and take you to Myself.'

So, then, there are three things here, the departure with its purpose,

the return, and the perfected union.

I. The Departure.

Our Lord's going away from that little group was a journey in two

stages. Calvary was the first; Olivet was the second. He means by the

phrase the whole continuous process which begins with His death and

ends in His ascension. Both are embraced in His words, and each

co-operates to the attainment of the great purpose.

He prepares a place for us by His death. The High Priest, in the

ancient ritual, once a year was privileged to lift the heavy veil and

pass into the darkened chamber, where only the light between the

cherubim was visible, because he bore in his hand the blood of the

sacrifice. But in our New Testament system the path into the holiest of

all,' the realisation of the most intimate fellowship with heavenly

things and communion with God Himself, are made possible, and the way

patent for every foot, because Jesus has died. And as the communion

upon earth, so the perfecting of the communion in the heavens. Who of

us could step within those awful sanctities, or stand serene amidst the

region of eternal light and stainless purity, unless, in His death, He

had borne the sins of the world, and, having overcome' its sharpness'

by enduring its blow, had opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all

believers'?

Old legends tell us of magic gates that resisted all attempts to force

them, but upon which, if one drop of a certain blood fell, they flew

open. And so, by His death, Christ has opened the gates and made the

heaven of perfect purity a dwelling-place for sinful men.

But the second stage of His departure is that which more eminently is

in Christ's mind here. He prepares a place for us by His entrance into

and His dwelling in the heavenly places. The words are obscure because

we have but few others with which to compare them, and no experience by

which to interpret them. We know so little about the matter that it is

not wise to say much; but though there be vast tracts of darkness round

the little spot of light, this should only make the spot of light more

vivid and more precious. We know little, but we know enough for mind

and heart to rest upon. Our ignorance of the ways in which Christ by

His ascension prepares a heaven for His followers should neither breed

doubt nor disregard of His assurance that He does.

If Christ had not ascended, would there have been a place' at all? He

has gone with a human body, which, glorified as it is, still has

relations to space, and must be somewhere. And we may even say that His

ascending up on high has made a place where His servants are. But apart

from that suggestion, which, perhaps, is going beyond our limits, we

may see that Christ's presence in heaven is needful to make it a heaven

for poor human souls. There, as here (Scripture assures us), and

throughout eternity as to-day, Jesus Christ is the Mediator of all

human knowledge and possession of God. It is from Him and through Him

that there come to men, whether they be men on earth or men in the

heavens, all that they know, all that they hope, all that they enjoy,

of the wisdom, love, beauty, peace, power, which flow from God. Take

away from the heaven of the Christian expectation that which comes to

the spirit through Jesus Christ, and you have nothing left. He and His

mediation and ministration alone make the brightness and the

blessedness of that high state. The very glories of all that lies

beyond the veil would have an aspect appalling and bewildering to us,

unless our Brother were there. Like some poor savages brought into a

great city, or rustics into the presence of a king and his court, we

should be ill at ease amidst the glories and solemnities of that future

life unless we saw standing there our Kinsman, to whom we can turn, and

who makes it possible for us to feel that it is home. Christ's presence

makes heaven the home of our hearts.

Not only did He go to prepare a place, but He is continuously preparing

it for us all through the ages. We have to think of a double form of

the work of Christ, His past work in His earthly life, and His present

in His exaltation. We have to think of a double form of His present

activity--His work with and in us here on earth, and His work for us

there in the heavens. We have to think of a double form of His work in

the heavens--that which the Scripture represents in a metaphor, the

full comprehension of which surpasses our present powers and

experiences, as being His priestly intercession; and that which my text

represents in a metaphor, perhaps a little more level to our

apprehension, as being His preparing a place for us. Behind the veil

there is a working Christ, who, in the heavens, is preparing a place

for all that love Him.

II. In the next place, note the Return.

The purpose of our Lord's departure, as set forth by Himself here,

guarantees for us His coming back again. That is the force of the

simple argumentation of my text, and of the pathetic and soothing

repetition of the sweet words, I go to prepare a place for you; and if

I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto

Myself.' Because the departure had for its purpose the preparing of the

place, therefore it is necessarily followed by a return. He who went

away as the Forerunner has not done His work until He comes back, and,

as Guide, leads those for whom He had prepared the place to the place

which He had prepared for them.

Now that return of our Lord, like His departure, may be considered as

having two stages. Unquestionably the main meaning and application of

the words is to that final and personal coming which stands at the end

of history, and to which the hopes of every Christian soul ought to be

steadfastly directed. He will so come in like manner as' He has gone.

We are not to water down such words as these into anything short of a

return precisely corresponding in its method to the departure; and as

the departure was visible, corporeal, literal, personal, and local, so

the return is to be visible, corporeal, literal, personal, local too.

He is to come as He went, a visible Manhood, only throned amongst the

clouds of heaven with power and great glory. This is the aim that He

sets before Him in His departure. He leaves in order that He may come

back again.

And, oh, dear friends! remember--and let us live in the strength of the

remembrance--that this return ought to be the prominent subject of

Christian aspiration and desire. There is much about the conception of

that solemn return, with all the convulsions that attend it, and the

judgment of which it is preliminary, that may well make men's hearts

chill within them. But for you and me, if we have any love in our

hearts and loyalty in our spirits to that King, His coming' should be

prepared as the morning,' and we should join in the great burst of

rapture of many a psalm, which calls upon rocks and hills to break

forth into singing, and trees of the field to clap their hands, because

He cometh as the King to judge the earth. His own parable tells us how

we ought to regard His coming. When the fig-tree's branch begins to

supple, and the little leaves to push their way through the polished

stem, then we know that summer is at hand. His coming should be as the

approach of that glorious, fervid time, in which the sunshine has

tenfold brilliancy and power, the time of ripened harvests and matured

fruits, the time of joy for all creatures that love the sun. It should

be the glad hope of all His servants.

We have a double witness to bear in the midst of this as of every

generation. One half of the witness stretches backwards to the Cross,

and proclaims Christ has come'; the other reaches onwards to the

Throne, and proclaims Christ will come.' Between these two high

uplifted piers swings the chain of the world's history, which closes

with the return, to judge and to save, of the Lord who came to die and

has gone to prepare a place for us.

But do not let us forget that we may well take another point of view

than this. Scripture knows of many comings of the Lord preliminary to,

and in principle one with, His last coming. For nations all great

crises of their history are comings of the Lord,' the Judge, and we are

strictly in the line of Scripture analogy when, in reference to

individuals, we see in each single death a true coming of the Lord.

That is the point of view in which we ought to look upon a Christian's

death-bed. The Master is come, and calleth for thee.' Beyond all

secondary causes, deeper than disease or accident, lies the loving will

of Him who is the Lord of life and of death. Death is Christ's

minister, mighty and beauteous, though his face be dark,' and he, too,

stands amidst the ranks of the ministering spirits sent forth to

minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation.' It is Christ that

says of one, I will that this man tarry,' and to another, Go!' and he

goeth. But whensoever a Christian man lies down to die, Christ says,

Come!' and he comes. How that thought should hallow the death-chamber

as with the print of the Master's feet! How it should quiet our hearts

and dry our tears! How it should change the whole aspect of that shadow

feared of man'! With Him for our companion, the lonely road will not be

dreary; and though in its anticipation, our timid hearts may often be

ready to say, Surely the darkness shall cover me,' if we have Him by

our sides, even the night shall be light about us.' The dying martyr

beneath the city wall lifted up his face to the heavens, and said, Lord

Jesus, receive my spirit!' It was the echo of the Master's promise, I

will come again, and receive you to Myself.'

III. Lastly, notice the Perfected Union.

The departure for such a purpose necessarily involved the return again.

Both are stages in the process, which is perfected by complete

union--That where I am there ye may be also.'

Christ, as I have been saying, is Heaven. His presence is all that we

need for peace, for joy, for purity, for rest, for love, for growth. To

be with Him,' as He tells us in another part of these wonderful last

words in the upper chamber, is to behold His glory.' And to behold His

glory, as John tells us in his Epistle, is to be like Him. So Christ's

presence means the communication to us of all the lustre of His

radiance, of all the whiteness of His purity, of all the depth of His

blessedness, and of a share in His wondrous dominion. His glorified

manhood will pass into ours, and they that are with Him where He is

will rest as in the centre and home of their spirits, and find Him

all-sufficient. His presence is my Heaven.

That is almost all we know. Oh! it is more than all we need to know.

The curtain is the picture. It is because what is there transcends in

glory all our present experience that Scripture can only hint at it and

describe it by negations--such as no night,' no sorrow,' no tears,'

former things passed away'; and by symbols of glory and lustre gathered

from all that is loftiest and noblest in human buildings and society.

But all these are but secondary and poor. The living heart of the hope,

and the lambent centre of the brightness, is, So shall we ever be with

the Lord.'

And it is enough. It is enough to make the bond of union between us in

the outer court and them in the holy place. Parted friends will fix to

look at the same star at the same moment of the night and feel some

union; and if we from amidst the clouds of earth, and they from amidst

the pure radiance of their heaven, turn our eyes to the same Christ, we

are not far apart. If He be the companion of each of us, He reaches a

hand to each, and, clasping it, the parted ones are united; and whether

we wake or sleep we live together,' because we both live with Him.

Brother! Is Jesus Christ so much to you that a heaven which consists in

nearness and likeness to Him has any attraction for you? Let Him be

your Saviour, your Sacrifice, your Helper, your Companion. Obey Him as

your King, love Him as your Friend, trust Him as your All. And be sure

that then the darkness will be but the shadow of His hand, and instead

of dreading death as that which separates you from life and love and

action and joy, you will be able to meet it peacefully, as that which

rends the thin veil, and unites you with Him who is the Heaven of

heavens.

He has gone to prepare a place for us. And if we will let Him, He will

prepare us for the place, and then come and lead us thither. Thou wilt

show me the path of life' which leads through death. In Thy presence is

fullness of joy, and at Thy right hand there are pleasures for

evermore.'

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THE WAY

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto Him,

Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?

Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man

cometh unto the Father, but by Me. If ye had known Me, ye should have

known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen

Him.'--JOHN xiv. 4-7.

Our Lord has been speaking of His departure, of its purpose, of His

return as guaranteed by that purpose, and of His servants' eternal and

perfect reunion with Him. But even these cheering and calming thoughts

do not exhaust His consolations, as they did not satisfy all the

disciples' needs. They might still have said, Yes; we believe that You

will come back again, and we believe that we shall be together; but

what about the parenthesis of absence?' And here is the answer, or at

least part of it: Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know'; or, if we

adopt the shortened form which the Revised Version gives us, Whither I

go ye know the way.'

When you say to a man, You know the way,' you mean Come.' And in these

words there lie, as it seems to me, a veiled invitation to the

disciples to come to Him before He came back for them, and the

assurance that they, though separated, might still find and tread the

road to the Father's house, and so be with Him still. They are not left

desolate. The Christ who is absent is present as the path to Himself.

And so the parenthesis is bridged across. Now in these verses we have

several large and important lessons which I think may best be drawn by

simply seeking to follow their course.

I. Observe the disciples' unconscious knowledge.

Jesus Christ says: Ye know the way and ye know the goal.' One of them

ventures flatly to contradict Him, and to traverse both assertions with

a brusque and thorough-going negative. We do not know whither Thou

goest,' says Thomas; how can we know the way?' He is the same man in

this conversation that we find him in the interview before our Lord's

journey to raise Lazarus, and in the interview after our Lord's

resurrection. In all three cases he appears as mainly under the

dominion of sense, as slow to apprehend anything beyond its limits, as

morbidly melancholy and disposed to take the blackest possible view of

things--a practical pessimist--and yet with a certain kind of frank

outspokenness which half redeems the other characteristics from blame.

He could not understand all the Lord's deep words just spoken. His mind

was befogged and dimmed, and he blurts out his ignorance, knowing that

the best place to carry it to is to the Illuminator who can make it

light.

We know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?' Was Jesus

right? was Thomas right? or were they both right? The fact is that

Thomas and all his fellows knew, after a fashion, but they did not know

that they knew. They had heard much in the past as to where Christ was

going. Plainly enough it had been rung in their ears over and over

again. It had made some kind of lodgment in their heads, and, in that

sense, they did know. It is this unused and unconscious knowledge of

theirs to which Christ appeals, and which He tries to draw out into

consciousness and power when He says, You know whither I am going, and

you know the road.' Is not that exactly what a patient teacher will do

with some flustered child when he says to it: Take time! You know it

well enough if you will only think'? So the Master says here: Do not be

agitated and troubled in heart. Reflect, remember, overhaul your

stores, and think what I have told you over and over again, and you

will find that you do know whither I am going, and that you do know the

way.'

The patient gentleness of the Master with the slowness of the scholars

is beautifully exemplified here, as is also the method, which He

lovingly and patiently adopts, of sending men back to consult their own

consciousness as illuminated by His teaching, and to see whether there

is not lying somewhere, unrecked of and unemployed in some dusty corner

of their mind, a truth that only needs to be dragged out and cleaned in

order to show itself for what it is, the all-sufficient light and

strength for the moment's need.

The dialogue is an instance of what is true about us all, that we have

in our possession truths given to us by Jesus Christ, the whole sweep

and bearing of which, the whole majesty and power and illuminating

capacity of which, we do not dream of yet. How much in our creeds lies

dim and undeveloped! Time and circumstances and some sore agony of

spirit are needed in order to make us realise the riches that we

possess, and the certitudes to which our troubled spirits may cling;

and the practice of far more patient, honest, profound meditation and

reflection than finds favour with the average Christian man is needed,

too, in order that the truths possessed may be possessed, and that we

may know what we know, and understand the things that are given to us

of God.'

In all your creeds, there are large tracts that you, in some kind of a

fashion, do believe; and yet they have no vitality in your

consciousness nor power in your lives. And the Master here does with

these disciples exactly what He is trying to do day by day with us,

namely, fling us back on ourselves, or rather upon His revelation in

us, and get us to fathom its depths and to walk round about its

magnitudes, and so to understand the things that we say we believe.

All our knowledge is ignorance. Ignorance that confesses itself to Him

is in the way of becoming knowledge. His light will touch the smoke and

change it into red spires of flame. If you do not know, go to Him and

say, Lord! I do not.' An accurate understanding of where the darkness

lies is the first step to the light. We are meant to carry all our

inadequate and superficial realisations of His truth into His presence,

that, from Him, we may gain deeper knowledge, a firmer faith, and a

more joyous certitude in His inexhaustible lessons. In every article

and item of the Christian faith there is a transcendent element which

surpasses our present comprehension. Let us be confident that the light

will break; and let us welcome the new illumination when it comes, sure

that it comes from God. Be not puffed up with the conceit that you know

all. Be sure of this, that, according to the good old metaphor, we are

but as children on the shore of the great ocean, gathering a few of the

shells that it has washed to our feet, itself stretching boundless,

and, thank God, sunlit, before us. Ye know the way.' Master, we know

not the way.'

II. Observe here, in the second place, our Lord's great self-revelation

which meets this unconscious knowledge.

Jesus saith unto him: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man

cometh unto the Father but by Me.' Now it is quite plain, I think, from

the whole strain of the context and the purpose of these words that the

main idea in them is the first--I am the Way.' And that is made more

certain because of the last words of the verse, which, summing up the

force of the three preceding assertions, dwell only upon the metaphor

of the Way; No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.' So that of these

three great words, the Way, the Truth, the Life, we are to regard the

second and the third as explanatory of the first. They are not

co-ordinate, but the first is the more general, and the other two show

how the first comes to be true. I am the Way' because I am the Truth

and the Life.'

There are no words of the Master, perhaps, to which my previous remarks

are more necessary to be applied than these. We know; and yet oh! what

an overplus of glory and of depth is here that we do not know and never

can know. The most fragmentary and inadequate grasp of them with heart

and mind will bring light to the mind and quietness and peace to the

heart; but the whole meaning of them goes beyond men and angels. We can

only skim the surface and seek to shift back the boundaries of our

knowledge a little further, and to embrace within its limits a little

more of the broad land into which the words bring us. So just take a

thought or two which may tend in that direction.

Note, then, as belonging to all three of these clauses that remarkable

I am.' We show a way, Christ is it. We speak truth, Christ is it.

Parents impart life, which they have received, Christ is Life. He

separates Himself from all men by that representation that He is not

merely the communicator or the teacher or the guide, but that He

Himself is, in His own personal Being, Way, Truth, Life. He said that,

when Calvary was within arm's-length. What did He think about Himself,

and what should we think of Him?

And then note, further, that He sets forth His unique relation to the

truth as being one ground on which He is the Way to God. He is the

Truth in reference to the divine nature. That Truth, then, is not a

mere matter of words. It is not only His speech that teaches us, but

Himself that shows us God. His whole life and character, His

personality, are the true representation within human conditions of the

Invisible God; and when He says, I am the Way and the Truth,' He is

saying substantially the same thing as the great prologue of this

Gospel says when it calls Him the Word and the Light of men, and as

Paul says when he names Him the Image of the Invisible God.' There is

all the difference between talking about God and showing Him. Men

reveal God by their words; Christ reveals Him by Himself and the facts

of His life. The truest and highest representation of the divine nature

that men can ever have is in the face of Jesus Christ.

I need only remind you in a sentence about other and lower applications

of this great saying, which do not, as I think, enter into the purpose

of the context. He is the Truth, inasmuch as, in the life and

historical manifestation of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Scriptures,

men find foundation truths of a moral and spiritual sort. Whatsoever

things are true, whatsoever things are noble, whatsoever things are

lovely and of good report,' He is these, and all true ethics is but the

formulating into principles of all the facts of the life and character

of Jesus Christ.

Further, my text says He is the Way because He is the Life. On the one

side God is brought to all hearts, and in some real sense to our

comprehension, by the life of Jesus Christ, and so He is the Way. But

that is not enough. There must be an action upon us as well as an

action having reference to the divine nature. God is brought to men by

the manifestation in Christ; and we, the dead, are quickened by the

communication of the Life. The one phrase points to all His work as a

Revealer, the other points to all His work upon us as life-giving

Spirit, a Quickener and an Inspirer. Dead men cannot walk a road. It is

of no use to make a path if it starts from a cemetery. Christ taught

that men apart from Him are dead, and that the only life that they can

have by which they can be knit to God is the divine life which was in

Himself, and of which He is the source and the principle for the whole

world. He does not tell us here what yet is true, and what He

abundantly tells in other parts of this great conversation, that the

only way by which the life which He brings can be diffused and

communicated is by His death. Except a corn of wheat fall into the

ground and die, it abideth alone.' He is the Life, and--paradox of

mystery and yet fact which is the very heart and centre of His

Gospel--His only way of giving His life to us is by giving up His

physical life for us. He must die that He may be the life-spring for

the world. The alabaster box must be broken if the ointment and its

fragrance are to be poured out; and death is the gate of life' in a

deeper than the ordinary sense of the saying, inasmuch as the death of

the Life which is Christ is the life of the death which we are.

And so, because, on the one hand, He brings a God to our hearts that we

can love and trust, and because, on the other, He communicates to our

spirits, dead in the only true death which is the separation from God

by sin, the life by which we are knit to God, He is the Way to the

Father.

And what about people that never heard of Him, to whom that Way has

been closed, to whom that Truth has never been manifested, to whom that

Life has never been brought? Ah! Christ has other ways of working than

through His historical manifestation, for there is no truth more

plainly taught in this great fourth Gospel than this, that that Light

lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' The eternal Word works

through all the earth, in ways beyond our ken, and wherever any man

has, however imperfectly, felt after and grasped the thought of a

Father in the heavens, there the Word, which is the Light of men, has

wrought.

But for us to whom this Book has come, for what people call in bitter

irony Christendom,' the law of my text rigidly applies, and it is being

worked out all round us to-day. No man cometh unto the Father but by

Me.' And here we are, in this England of ours, and in our sister

nations on the continent of Europe and in America, face to face as I

believe with this alternative--either Jesus Christ the Revealer of God

and the Life of men, or an empty Heaven. And for you, individually, it

is either--take Christ for the Way, or wander in the wilderness and

forget your Father. It is either--take Christ for the Truth, or be

given over to the insufficiencies of mere natural, political, and

intellectual truths, and the shows and illusions of time and sense. It

is either--take Christ for your Life, or remain in your deadness,

separate from God.

III. Lastly, we have here the disciples' ignorance and the new vision

which dispels it.

If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also, and from

henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him.' Our Lord accepts for the

moment Thomas's standpoint. He supplements His former allegation of the

disciples' knowledge with the admission of the ignorance which went

with it as its shadow, and was only too sadly and plainly shown by

their failure to discern in Him the manifestation of the Father. He has

just told them that they did know what they thought they knew not; He

now tells them that they did not know what they thought they knew so

well, after so many years of companionship--even Himself. The proof

that they did not is that they did not know the Father as revealed in

Him, nor Him as revealing the Father. If they missed that, they missed

everything; and for all they had known of His graciousness, were

strangers to His truest Self. Their ignorance would turn out knowledge,

if they would think, and their supposed knowledge would turn out

ignorance.

The lesson for us is that the true test of the completeness and worth

of our knowledge of Christ lies in its being knowledge of God the

Father, brought near to us by Him. This saying puts a finger on the

radical deficiency of all merely humanitarian views of Christ's person,

however clearly they may see and admiringly extol the beauty of His

character and the sweet reasonableness' of His wisdom. They all break

down here, and are arraigned as so shallow and incomplete that they do

not deserve to be called knowledge of Him at all. If you know anything

about Jesus Christ rightly, this is what you know about Him, that in

Him you see God. If you have not seen God in Him, you have not got to

the heart of the mystery. The knowledge of Christ which stops with the

Man and the Martyr, and the Teacher and the beautiful, gentle Brother,

is knowledge so partial that even He cannot venture to call it other

than ignorance. Oh! brethren, do our conceptions of Him meet this test

which He Himself has laid down, and can we say that, seeing Him, we see

in Him God?

And then our Lord passes on to another thought, the new vision which at

the moment was being granted to this unconscious ignorance that was

passing into conscious knowledge. From henceforth ye know Him and have

seen Him.' We must give that from henceforth,' as a note of time, a

somewhat liberal interpretation, and apply it to the whole series of

utterances and deeds of which the words of our text are but a portion.

And, if so, we come to this--it was in the wisdom, and the gentleness,

and the deep truths of that upper chamber; it was in the agony and

submission of Gethsemane; it was in the meek patience before the

judges, and the silent acceptance of ignominy and shame; it was in the

willing, loving endurance of the long hours upon the Cross, that Christ

inaugurated the new stage in His revelation of God and in His

life-giving to the world. And it is from thenceforth and thereby that

in the man Jesus, men know and see the Father' as they never did

before. The Cross and the Passion of Christ are the unveiling to the

world of the heart of God; and by the side of that new vision the

fairest and the loftiest and the sweetest of Christ's former

manifestations and utterances sink into comparative insignificance. It

is the dying Christ that reveals the living God.

So, dear friends, He is your way to God. See that ye seek the Father by

Him alone. He is your Truth; grapple Him to your hearts, and by patient

meditation and continual faithfulness enrich yourselves with all the

communicated treasures that you have already received in Him. He is

your Life; cleave to Him, that the quick Spirit that was in Him may

pass into you and make you victors over all deaths, temporal and

eternal. Know Him as a Friend, not as a mere historical person, or with

mere head-knowledge, for to know a friend is something far deeper than

to know a truth. Acquaint thyself with Him and be at peace.' This is

life eternal, to know,' with the knowledge which is life and

possession, Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast

sent.'

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THE TRUE VISION OF GOD

Philip saith unto Jesus, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

9. Jesus saith unto Him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet

hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the

Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou

not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I

speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father, that dwelleth in

Me, He doeth the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the

Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sake.'--JOHN xiv.

8-11.

The vehement burst with which Philip interrupts the calm flow of our

Lord's discourse is not the product of mere frivolity or curiosity. One

hears the ring of earnestness in it, and the yearnings of many years

find voice. Philip had felt out of his depth, no doubt, in the profound

teachings which our Lord had been giving, but His last words about

seeing God set a familiar chord vibrating. As an Old Testament believer

he knew that Moses had once led the elders of Israel up to the mount

where they saw the God of Israel,' and that to many others had been

granted sensible manifestations of the divine presence. As a disciple

he longed for some similar sign to confirm his faith. As a man he was

conscious of the deep need which all of us have, whether we are

conscious of it or not, for something more real and tangible than an

unseeable and unknowable God. The peculiarities of Philip's temperament

strengthened the desire. The first appearance that he makes in the

Gospels is characteristically like this his last. To all Nathanael's

objections he had only the reply, Come and see.' And here he says: Oh!

if we could see the Father it would be enough.' He was one of the men

to whom seeing is believing, and so he speaks.

His petition is childlike in its simplicity, beautiful in its trust,

noble and true in its estimate of what men need. He longs to see God.

He believes that Christ can show God; he is sure that the sight of God

will satisfy the heart. These are errors, or truths, according to what

is meant by seeing.' Philip meant a palpable manifestation, and so far

he was wrong. Give the word its highest and its truest meaning, and

Philip's error becomes grand truth. Our Lord gently, lovingly, and with

only a hint of rebuke, answers the request, and seeks to disengage the

error from the truth. His answer lies in the verses that we have read.

Let us try to follow them, and, as we may, to skim their surface, for

their depths are beyond us.

First of all, then, we have the sight of God in Christ as enough to

answer men's longings. There is a world of sadness and tenderness, of

suppressed pain and of grieved affection, in the first words of our

Lord's reply. Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not

known Me, Philip?' He seldom names His disciples. When He does, there

is a deep cadence of affection in the designation. This man was one of

the first disciples, the little original band called by Christ Himself,

and thus had been with Him all the time of His ministry, and the Master

wonders with a gentle wonder that, before eyes that loved Him as much

as Philip's did, His continual self-revelation had been made to so

little purpose. In the answer, in its first portion, there lies the

reiteration of the thoughts that I was trying to dwell upon in the last

sermon, which, therefore, I may lightly touch now--viz., that the sight

of Christ is the sight of God--He that hath seen Me hath seen the

Father'--and that not to know Christ as thus showing God is not to know

Him at all--Thou hast not known Me, Philip.' Further, there is the

thought that the sight of God in Christ is sufficient, How sayest thou,

Shew us the Father?' From all this we may gather some thoughts on which

I lightly touch.

I. The first is, that we all do need to have God made visible to us.

The history of heathendom shows us that, in every land men have said,

The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men.' And the highest

cultivation of this highly cultivated and self-conscious twentieth

century has not removed us from the same necessity that the rudest

savage has, to have some kind of manifestation of the divine nature

other than the dim and vague ones which are possible apart from the

revelation of God in Christ. A God who is only the product of

inferences from creation, or providence, or the mysteries of history,

or the wonders of my own inner life, the creature of logic or of

reflection, is very powerless to sway and influence men. The

limitations of our faculties and the boundlessness of our hearts both

cry out for a God who is nearer to us than that, and whom we can see

and love and be sure of. The whole world wants the making visible of

divinity as its deepest want. And your heart and mind require it.

Nothing else will ever stay our hunger, will ever answer our

questioning minds.

Christ meets this need. How can you make wisdom visible? How can a man

see love or purity? How do I see your spirit? By the deeds of your

body. And the only way by which God can ever come near enough to men to

be a constant power and a constant motive in their lives is by their

seeing Him at work in a Man, who amongst them is His image and

revelation. Christ's whole life is the making visible of the invisible

God. He is the manifestation to the world of the unseen Father.

That vision is enough--enough for mind, enough for heart, enough for

will. There is none else that is sufficient, but this is. How sayest

thou, Shew us the Father?' If we can see God it suffices us. Then the

mind settles down upon the thought of Him as the basis of all being,

and of all change, and the heart can twine itself round Him, and the

seeking soul folds its wings and is at rest, and the troubled spirit is

quiet, and the accusing conscience is silent, and the rebellious will

is subdued, and the stormy passions are quieted, and in the inner

kingdom is a great peace. The sight of God in Christ brings rest to

every heart, and, Oh! the absence of the vision is the true secret of

all disquiet. We are troubled and careful, and tossed from one stormy

billow to another, and swept over by all the winds that blow, because

we see not God, our Father, in the face of Jesus. Show us the Father,

and it sufficeth us,' is either a puerile petition, or the deepest and

noblest prayer of the human heart. Blessed are they who have learned

what it is to see, and know where that great sight is to be seen!

Our present knowledge and vision are far higher than that mere external

symbol of God which this man wanted. The elders of Israel saw the God

of Israel, but what they saw was but some symbolical manifestation of

that which in itself is unseen and unattainable. But we who see God in

Christ see no symbol but the Reality, and there is nothing more

possible or to be hoped for here. Our present manifestation and sight

of God in Christ does fall, in some ways unknown to us, beneath the

bright hopes that we are entitled to cherish. But howsoever imperfect

it may be, as measured against the perfection of the vision when we

shall see face to face, and know even as we are known, it is enough,

and more than enough, for all the questionings and desires of our

hungering spirits.

II. Our Lord goes on to a further answer, and points to the divine and

mutual indwelling by which this sight is made possible.

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The

words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself, but the Father that

dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works.' There are here, mainly, two

things, Christ's claim to the oneness of unbroken communion, and

Christ's claim, consequently, to the oneness of complete co-operation.

I am in the Father' indicates the suppression of all independent and

therefore rebellious will, consciousness, thought and action; And the

Father in Me' indicates the influx into that perfectly filial Manhood

of the whole fullness of God in unbroken, continuous, gentle, deep

flow. These are the two sides of this great mystery on which neither

wisdom nor reverence lead us to dilate; and they combine to express the

closest and most uninterrupted blending, interpenetration, and

communion.

And then follows the other claim, that because of this continuous

mutual indwelling there is perfect cooperation. This is also stated in

terms corresponding to the preceding double representation. The words

that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself,' corresponds to, I am in

the Father.' The Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works,'

corresponds to The Father in Me.' The two put together teach us this,

that by reason of that mysterious and ineffable union of communion,

Jesus Christ in all His words and in all His works is the perfect

instrument of the divine will, so that His words are God's words, and

His works are God's works; so that, when He speaks, His gentle wisdom,

His loving sympathy, His melting tenderness, His authoritative

commands, His prophetic threatenings, are the speech of God, and that

when He acts, whether it be by miracle or in the ordinary deeds of His

life, what we see is God working before our eyes as we never see Him in

any human being.

And from all this follow just two or three considerations which I name.

Note the absolute absence of any consciousness on Christ's part of the

smallest deflection or disharmony between Himself and the Father. Two

triangles laid on each other are in every line, point, and angle

absolutely coincident. That humanity is capable of receiving the whole

inflow of God, and that indwelling God is perfectly expressed in the

humanity. There is no trace of a consciousness of sin. Everything that

Jesus Christ said He knew to be God's speaking; everything that He did

He knew to be God's acting. There were no barriers between the two.

Jesus Christ was conscious of no separation--not the thinnest film of

air between these Two who adhered and inhered so closely and so

continuously. It is an awful assertion.

Now I pray you to ask yourselves the question: If this was what Christ

said, what did He think of Himself? And is this a Man, like the rest of

us, with blotches and sins, with failures to embody His own ideas, and

still more to carry out in life the will that He knows to be God's

will? Is this a man like other men who thus speaks to us? If Jesus had

this consciousness, either He was ludicrously, tragically,

blasphemously, utterly mistaken and untrustworthy, or He is what the

Church in all ages has confessed Him to be, the Everlasting Son of the

Father.'

III. Lastly, our Lord further sets before us the faith to which He

invites us on the ground of His union with, and revelation of, God.

Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me, or else

believe Me for the very works' sake.' Observe that the verb at the

beginning of this last verse of our text passes into a plural form. Our

Lord has done with Philip especially, and speaks now to all who hear

Him, and to us amongst the rest of His auditors. He bids us believe

Him, and believe something about Him on the strength of His own

testimony, or, in default of that, and as second best, believe Him on

the testimony of His works. I gather together what I have to say about

this point into three remarks.

The true bond of union between men and Jesus Christ is faith. We have

to trust, and that is better than sight. We have to trust Him. He is

the personal Object of our faith. In all faith there is what I may call

a moral and a voluntary element. A man believes a proposition because

it is forced upon him, and his intelligence is obliged to accept it. A

man trusts Christ because he will trust Him, and the moral and

voluntary element carries us far beyond the mere intellectual

conception of faith as the assent to a set of theological propositions.

Faith really is the outgoing of the whole man--heart, will, intellect,

and all--to a person whom it grasps. But the Christ that you and I have

to trust is the Christ as He Himself has declared Himself to us.

Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me.' There is a

bastard, mutilated kind of thing that calls itself Christian faith,

that goes about the world in this generation, which believes in Jesus

Christ in all sorts of beautiful ways, but it will not believe in Him

as the Personal Revelation and making visible of the unseen God. Jesus

Christ Himself tells us here that that is not the kind of faith which

He invites us to put forth. If we put forth that only, we have not yet

come to understand Him. Oh, dear friends! Christ as here declared to us

by Himself is the only Christ to whom it is right to give our trust. If

He be not God manifest in the flesh, I ought not to trust Him. I may

admire Him as a historical personage; I may reverence Him for His

wisdom and beauty; I may even in some vague way have a kind of love to

Him. But what in the name of common sense shall I trust Him for? And

why should He call upon me to exercise faith in Him unless He stand

before me as the adequate Object of a man's trust--namely, the manifest

God?

And then, further, note that believing in the sense of trusting is

seeing and knowing. Philip said, Shew us the Father.' Christ answers,

Believe, and thou dost see.' If you look back upon the previous verses

of this chapter, you will find that in the earlier portion of them the

key-word is know'; that in the second portion of them the key-word is

see'; that in this portion of them the key-word is believe.' The world

says, Ah! seeing is believing.' The Gospel says, Believing is seeing.'

The true way to knowledge, and to a better vision than the uncertain

vision of the eye, is faith. In certitude and in directness, the

knowledge of God that we have through faith in the Christ whom our eyes

have never seen is far ahead of the certitude and the directness that

attach to our mere bodily sight; and so the key to all divine

knowledge, and the sure road to the truest vision of God, is faith.

Further, faith, even if based upon lower than the highest grounds, is

still faith, and acceptable to Him: Or else believe Me for the very

works' sake.' The works' are mainly, I suppose, though not exclusively,

His miracles. And if so, we are here taught that, if a man has not come

to that point of spiritual susceptibility in which the image of Jesus

Christ lays hold upon His heart and obliges him to trust Him and to

love Him, there are yet the miracles to look at; and the faith that

grasps them, and by help of that ladder climbs to Him, though it be

second best, is yet real. The evidence of miracles is subordinate, and

yet it is valid and true. So our Lord contradicts both the

exaggerations of past generations and the exaggerations of this, and

neither asserts that the great reason for faith is miracles, nor that

miracles are of no use at all. Former centuries in the Christian Church

reiterated the former exaggeration, and thus partly provoked the

exaggeration of this day. Let us keep the middle course: there is a

better way of coming to Christ than through the gate of miracles, and

that is that He should stamp His own divine sweetness and elevation

upon our minds and hearts. But if we have not reached that point, do

not let us kick away the ladder that may help us to it. Believe Him for

the very works' sake.' Imperfect faith may be the highway to

perfection. Let us follow the light, if it be but a far-off glimmer,

sure that it will bring us into noontide day if we are faithful to its

leading.

On the other hand, dear friends, let us remember that no faith avails

itself of all the treasures laid up for it, which does not lay hold

upon Christ in the character in which He presents Himself. The only

adequate, worthy trust in Him is the trust which grasps Him as the

Incarnate God and Saviour. Only such a faith does justice to His own

claim. Only such a faith is the sure path to vision and to knowledge.

Only such a faith draws down the blessing of a questioning intellect

answered, a hungry heart satisfied, a conscience, accusing and

prophetic of a judgment to come, cleansed and purified.

To each of us Christ addresses His merciful invitation, Believe Me that

I am in the Father, and the Father in Me.' May we all answer, We

believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!'

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CHRIST'S WORKS AND OURS

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that

I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do;

because I go unto My Father. 13. And whatsoever ye shall ask in My

name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14.

If ye shall ask any thing in My name, I will do it.'--JOHN xiv. 12-14.

I have already pointed out in a previous sermon that the key-word of

this context is Believe!' In three successive verses we find it, each

time widening in its application. We have first the question to the

single disciple: Philip! believest thou not?' We have then the

invitation addressed to the whole group: Believe Me!' And here we have

a wholly general expression referring to all who, in every generation

and corner of the world, put their trust in Christ, and extending the

sunshine of this great promise to whosoever believeth in Him. Our Lord

has pointed to believing as the great antidote to a troubled heart, as

the sure way of knowing the Father, as the better substitute for sight;

and now here He opens before us still more wonderful prerogatives and

effects of faith. His words carry us up into lofty and misty regions,

where we can neither breathe freely nor see clearly, except as we hold

to His words. Therefore He prefaces them with His Verily, verily!'

bidding us listen to them with sharpened attention as the disclosure of

something wonderful, and receive them with unfaltering confidence, on

His authority, however marvellous and otherwise undiscoverable they may

be.

What is it, then, that He thus commends to our acceptance? If I may

venture a paraphrase which may at least have the advantage of being

cast into less familiar words, it is just this, that because of, and

after, Christ's departure from earth, He will, in response to prayer,

work upon faithful souls in such a fashion as that they will do what He

did, and in some sense will do even more.

I. We have here the continuous work of the exalted Lord for and through

His servants.

These disciples, of course, were trembling and oppressed with the

thought that the departure of Jesus would be the end of His ceaseless

activity for them, on which they had depended implicitly for so long.

Henceforward, whatever distress or need might come, that Voice would be

silent, and that Hand motionless, and they would be left to face every

storm, uncompanioned and uncounselled. Some of us know how dreary such

experience makes life, and we can understand how these men shrank from

the prospect. Christ's words give strength to meet that trial, and not

only tell them that after He is gone they will be able to do what they

cannot do now, and what He used to do for them, but that in them He

will work as well as for them, and be the power of their action, after

He has departed.

For, notice the remarkable connection of the words with which we are

dealing. He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do,' and

the ground of that is because I go to My Father,' and whatsoever the

believer shall ask, I will do.'

So, then, there are here two very distinct paths on which Christ

represents to us that His future activity will travel; the one, that of

doing for us, in response to our prayers; the other that of working on

us and in us, so that our acts are His and His acts are ours. We may

look at these two for a moment separately.

Here, then, there is clearly stated this great thought, that Christ's

removal from the world is not the end of His activity in the world and

on material things, but that, absent, He still is a present power, and

having passed through death, and been removed from sense, He can still

operate upon the things round us, and move these according to His will.

We are not to water down such words as these into any such thought as

that the continuous influence of the memory and history of His past

will be a present power in all ages.

That is true, gloriously and uniquely true, but that is not the truth

which He speaks here. Over and above that perpetual influence of past

recorded work, there is the present influence of His present work, and

to-day He is working as truly as He wrought when on earth. One form of

His work was finished on Calvary, as His dying breath proclaimed; but

there is another work of Christ in the midst of the ages, moving the

pawns on the chessboard of the world, and presiding over the fortunes

of the solemn conflict, which will not be ended until that day when the

angel voices shall chant, It is done! The kingdoms of the world are the

kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.' The living Christ works by a

true forth-putting of His own present power upon material things, and

amidst the providences of life. And therefore these disciples were not

to be cast down as if His work for them were ended.

Now it is clear, of course, that such words as these do demand for

their vindication something perfectly unique and solitary in the nature

and person of Jesus Christ. All other men's work is cut in twain by

death. This man, having served his generation by the will of God, fell

on sleep and was gathered to his fathers, and saw corruption,' that is

the epitaph over the greatest thinkers, statesmen, heroes, poets, the

epitaph for the tenderest and most hopeful. Father, mother, husband,

wife, child, friend, all cease to act when they die, and though

thunders should break, they are silent and can help no more. But Christ

is living to-day, and working all around us.

Now, brethren, it is of the last importance for the joyousness of our

Christian lives, and for the courage of our conflict with sorrow and

sin, that we should give a very prominent place in our creeds, and our

hearts, to this great truth of a living Christ. What a joyful sense of

companionship it brings to the solitary, what calmness of vision in

contemplating the complications and calamities of the world's history,

if we grasp firmly the assurance that the living Christ is actually

working by the present forth-putting of His power in the world to-day!

But that is not all. There is another path on which our Lord shows us

here a glimpse of His working, not only for us, but on and in and

therefore through us, so that the deeds that we do in faith that rests

upon Him are in one aspect His, and in another ours.

The works that I do shall He do also'; because whatsoever ye shall ask

I will do it.'

We have not to think only of a Lord whose activity for us, beneficent

and marvellous as it is, was finished in the misty past upon the Cross,

nor have we only to think of a Lord whose activity for us, mighty and

comforting as it is to all the solitary and struggling, is wrought as

from the heights of the heavens, but we have to think of One who is

beside us and in us and knows the hidden paths that no eye sees, and no

foot but His can tread, into the inmost recesses of our souls, and

there can enter as King and righteousness, as life and strength. This

is the deepest of the lessons that He would teach us here. I live, yet

not I, but Christ liveth in me,' and through me, if I keep close to

Him, will work mightily in forms that my poor manhood could never have

reached. The emblem of the vine and the branches, and the other emblem

of the house and its inhabitants, and the other of the head and the

members, all point to this one same thing which shallow and unspiritual

men call mystical,' but which is the very heart of the Christian

prerogative and the anchor of the Christian hope. Christ in us is our

present righteousness and our hope of a future glory.

And now mark that a still more solemn and mysterious aspect of this

union of Jesus Christ and the believer is given, since it is set forth

as resulting in our doing Christ's works, and Christ doing ours; and

therein is paralleled with the yet more wonderful and ineffable union

between the Father and the Son. It is no accident that in one clause He

says, I am in the Father, and the Father in Me. The words that I speak

unto you I speak not of Myself, but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He

doeth the works'; and that in the next He says, The works that I do

shall he do also'; and so bids us see in that union between the Father

and the Son, and in that consequent union of co-operation between Him

and His Father, a pattern after which our union with Him is to be

moulded, both as regards the closeness of its intimacy and as regards

the resulting manifestations in life. Christ is in us and we in Christ

in some measure as the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son.

And the works that we do He does in some fashion that faintly echoes

and shadows the perfect co-operation of the Father and the Son in the

works that the Christ did upon the earth.

All the doings of a Christian man, if done in faith, and holding by

Christ, are Christ's doings, inasmuch as He is the life and the power

which does them all. And Christ's deeds are reproduced and perpetuated

in His humble follower, inasmuch as the life which is imparted will

unfold itself according to its own kind; and he that loves Christ will

be changed into His likeness, and become a partaker of His Spirit. So

let us curb all self-dependence and self-will, that that mighty tide

may flow into us; and let us cast from us all timidity, distrust, and

gloom, and be strong in the assurance that we have a Christ living in

the heavens to work for us, and living within us to work through us.

There is no record of the Ascension in John's Gospel, but these words

of my text unveil to us the inmost meaning of that Ascension, and are

in full accord with the great picture which one of the Evangelists has

drawn--a picture in two halves, which yet are knit together into one.

So then, after He had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven,

and sat at the right hand of God; and they went forth and preached

everywhere.' What a contrast between the two--the repose above, the

toil below! Yes! But the next words knit them together--The Lord also

working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.'

II. Note, in the next place, the greater work of the servants on and

for whom the Lord works. Greater works than these shall he do.' Is,

then, the servant greater than his Lord, and he that is sent greater

than He that sent him? Not so, for whatsoever the servant does is done

because the Lord is with and in him, and the contrast that is drawn

between the works that Christ does on earth and the greater works that

the servant is to do hereafter is, properly and at bottom, the contrast

between Christ's manifestations in the time of His earthly limitation

and humiliation, and His manifestations in the time of His Ascension

and celestial glory.

We need not be afraid that such great words as these in any measure

trench on the unique and unapproachable character of the earthly work

of Christ in its two aspects, which are one--of Revelation and

Redemption. These are finished, and need no copy, no repetition, no

perpetuation, until the end of time. But the work of objective

Revelation, which was completed when He ascended, and the work of

Redemption which was finished when He rose--these require to be applied

through the ages. And it is in regard to the application of the

finished work of Christ to the actual accomplishment of its

contemplated consequences, that the comparison is drawn between the

limited sphere and the small results of Christ's work upon earth, and

the worldwide sweep and majestic magnitude of the results of the

application of that work by His servants' witnessing work. The wider

and more complete spiritual results achieved by the ministration of the

servants than by the ministration of the Lord is the point of

comparison here. And I need only remind you that the poorest Christian

who can go to a brother soul, and by word or life can draw that soul to

a Christ whom it apprehends as dying for its sins and raised for its

glorifying, does a mightier thing than it was possible for the Master

to do by life or lip whilst He was here upon earth. For the Redemption

had to be completed in act before it could be proclaimed in word; and

Christ had no such weapon in His hands with which to draw men's souls,

and cast down the high places of evil, as we have when we can say, We

testify unto you that the Son of God hath died for our sins, and is

raised again according to the Scriptures.' Nor need I do more than

remind you of the comparison, so exalting for His humility and so

humbling for our self-exaltation, between the narrow sphere in which

His earthly ministrations had to operate and the worldwide scope which

is given to His servants. He laid His hands on a few sick folk, and

healed them'; and at the end of His life there were one hundred and

twenty disciples in Jerusalem and five hundred in Galilee, and you

might have put them all into this chapel and had ample room to spare.

That was all that Jesus Christ had done; while to-day and now the world

is being leavened and the kingdoms of the earth are beginning to

recognise His name. Greater works than these shall he do' who lets

Christ in him do all His works.

III. Lastly, notice the conditions on which the exalted Lord works for

and on His servants.

These are two, faith and prayer.

He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also.' Faith,

the simple act of loving trust in Jesus Christ, opens the door of our

hearts and natures for the entrance of all His solemn Omnipotence, and

makes us possessors of it. It is the condition, and the only condition,

and plainly the indispensable condition, of possessing this divine

Christ's power, that we should trust ourselves to Him that gives it.

And if we do, then we shall not trust in vain, but to us there will

come power that will surpass our desire, and fill us with its own

rejoicing and pure energy. Faith will make us like Christ. Faith is

intensely practical. He that believeth shall do.' It is no mere cold

assent to a creed which is utterly impotent to operate upon men's acts,

no mere hysterical emotion which is utterly impotent to energise into

nobilities of service and miracles of consecration, but it is the

affiance of the whole nature which spreads itself before Him and prays,

Fill my emptiness and vitalise me with Thine own Spirit.' That is the

faith which is ever answered by the inrush of the divine power, and the

measure of our capacity of receiving is the measure of His gift to us.

So if Christian individuals and Christian communities are impotent, or

all but impotent, there is no difficulty in understanding why. They

have cut the connection, they have shut the tap. They lack faith; and

so their power is weakness. Why could we not cast him out?' said they,

perplexed when they had no need to be. Why could you not cast him out?

Because you do not believe that I, working in you, can cast him out.

That is why; and the only why.' Let us learn that the secret of

Christians' weakness is the weakness of their Christian faith.

And the other condition is prayer. Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name I

will do it,' and He repeats it, for confirmation and for greater

emphasis. If ye shall ask anything in My name,' or, as perhaps that

clause ought to be read with some versions, If ye shall ask Me anything

in My name I will do it.'

Three points may be named here. Our power depends upon our prayer.

God's and Christ's fullness and willingness to communicate do not

depend upon our prayer. But our capacity to receive of that fullness,

and so the possibility of its communication to us, do depend upon our

prayer. We have not because we ask not.'

The power of our prayer depends upon our conscious oneness with the

revealed Christ. If ye shall ask in My name,' says He. And people think

they have fulfilled the condition when, in a mechanical and external

manner, they say, as a formula at the end of petitions that have been

all stuffed full of self-will and selfishness, for Christ's sake.

Amen!' and then they wonder they do not get them answered! Is that

asking in Christ's name?

Christ's name is the revelation of Christ's character, and to do a

thing in the name of another person is to do it as His representative,

and as realising that in some deep and real sense--for the present

purpose at all events--we are one with Him. And it is when we know

ourselves to be united to Christ and one with Him, and representative

in a true fashion of Himself, as well as when, in humble reliance on

His work for us and His loving heart, we draw near, that our prayer has

power, as the old divines used to say, to move the Hand that moves the

world,' and to bring down a rush of blessing upon our heads. Prayer in

the name of Christ is hard to offer. It needs much discipline and

watchfulness; it excludes all self-will and selfishness. And if, as my

text tells us, the end of the Son's working is the glory of the Father,

that same end, and not our own ease or comfort, must be the end and

object of all prayer which is offered in His name. When we so pray we

get an answer. And the reason why such multitudes of prayers never

travel higher than the roof, and bring no blessings to him who prays,

is because they are not prayers in Christ's name.

Prayer in His name will pass into prayer to Him. As He not obscurely

teaches us here (if we adopt the reading to which I have already

referred), He has an ear to hear such requests, and He wields divine

power to answer. Surely it was not blasphemy nor any diversion of the

worship due to God alone, when the dying martyr outside the city wall

cried and said, Lord Jesus! receive my spirit.' Nor is it any departure

from the solemnest obligations laid upon us by the unity of the divine

nature, nor are we bringing idolatrous petitions to another than the

Father, when we draw near to Christ and ask Him to give us that which

He gives as the Father's gift, and to work on us that which the Father

that dwelleth in Him works through Him for us.

Trust yourselves to Christ, and let your desires be stilled, to listen

to His voice in you, and let that voice speak. And then, dear brethren,

we shall be lifted above ourselves, and strength will flow into us, and

we shall be able to say, I can do all things, through the Christ that

dwells in me and makes me strong.' And just as the glad, sunny waters

of the incoming tide fill the empty places of some oozy harbour, where

all the ships are lying as if dead, and the mud is festering in the

sunshine, so into the slimy emptiness of our corrupt hearts there will

pour the flashing sunlit wave, the ever fresh rush of His power; and

everything will live whithersoever it cometh,' and we shall be able to

say in all humility, and yet in glad recognition of Christ's

faithfulness to this, His transcendent promise, I live, yet not I, but

Christ liveth in me,' because the life which I live in the flesh I live

by faith of the Son of God.'

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LOVE AND OBEDIENCE

If ye love Me, keep My commandments.'--JOHN xiv. 15.

As we have seen in former sermons, the keyword of the preceding context

is Believe!' and that word passes now into Love.' The order here is the

order of experience. There is first the believing gaze upon the Christ

as He is revealed--the image of the invisible God. That kindles love,

and prompts to obedience.

There is another very beautiful and subtle link of connection between

these words and the preceding. Our Lord has just been saying,

Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do.' Is the parallel

wholly accidental or fanciful between the Lord who does as the servant

asks and the servant who is to do as the Lord commands? On both sides

there is love delighting to be set in motion by a message from the

other side. On the one part there is love supreme which commands and

delights to be asked, on the other part there is love dependent, which

asks and delights to be commanded; and though the gulf between the two

is great, and the difference between Christ's law and our petitions is

infinite, yet there is an analogy.

I pause on these words, though they are introduced here only as the

basis of the great promise which follows, because they open out into

such wide fields. They contain the all-sufficient law of Christian

conduct. They contain the one motive adequate to bring that law into

realisation. They disclose the very roots of Christian morality, and

part of the secret of Christ's unique power and influence amongst men.

They come with a message of encouragement to all souls despairing of

being able to do that which they would, and of freedom to all men

burdened with a crowd of minute and external regulations. If ye love

Me, keep My commandments'--there are three points to be dwelt upon

here--namely, the all-sufficient ideal or guide of life, the

all-powerful motive which Christ brings to bear, and the all-subduing

gaze of faith by which that motive is brought into action.

I. We have here the all-sufficient ideal or guide for life.

Jesus Christ is not speaking merely to that little handful of men in

the upper chamber, but to all generations and to all lands, to the end

of time and round the world. The authoritative tone which He assumes

here is very noteworthy. He speaks as Jehovah spoke from Sinai, and

quotes the very words of the old law when He speaks of keeping My

commandments.' There are distinctly involved in this quite incidental

utterance of Christ's two startling things--one the assumption of His

right to impose His will upon every human being, and the other His

assumption that His will contains the all-sufficient directory for

human conduct.

What, then, are His commandments? Those which He spoke are plain and

simple; and people who wish to pick holes in the greatness of Christ's

work in the world tell us that you can match almost all His precepts up

and down amongst moralists and philosophers, and they crow very loud

if, scratching amongst Rabbinical dust-heaps, they find something that

looks like anything that He once said. Be it so! What does that matter?

Christ's commandments' are Christ Himself. This is the originality and

uniqueness of Christ as a moral Teacher, that He says, not Do this,

that, and the other thing,' but Copy Me.' Take My yoke upon you and

learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.' His commandments are

Himself; and the sum of them all is this--a character perfectly

self-oblivious, and wholly penetrated and saturated with joyful, filial

submission to the Father, and uttermost and entire giving Himself away

to His brethren. That is Christ's commandment which He bids us keep,

and His law is to be found in His life.

And then, if that be so, what a change passes on the aspect of law,

when we take Christ as being our living embodiment of it! Everything

that was hard, repellent, far-off, cold, vanishes. We have no longer

tables of stone,' but fleshy tables of the heart'; and the Law stands

before us, a Being to be loved, to be clung to, to be trusted, and whom

it is blessedness to know and perfection to resemble. The rails upon

which the train travels may be rigid, but they mean safety, and they

carry men smoothly into otherwise inaccessible lands. So the life of

Jesus Christ brought to us is the firm and plain track along which we

are to travel; and all that was difficult and hard in the cold thought

of duty becomes changed into the attraction of a living Pattern and

Example. This living and breathing and loving commandment is

all-sufficient for every detail and complexity of human life. It is so

by the confession of believers and of unbelievers, by the joyful

confession of the one, and by the frank acknowledgment of many of the

others. Listen to one of them. Whatever else may be taken away from us

by rational criticism, Christ is still left, a unique Figure, not more

unlike all His predecessors than all His followers . . . . Religion

cannot be said to have made a bad choice in selecting this Man as the

ideal Representative and Guide of humanity; nor even now would it be

easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule

of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavour so to

live that Christ would approve our life.'

It is enough for conduct, it is enough for character, it is enough in

all perplexities of conflicting duties, that we listen to and obey the

voice that says, Keep My commandments.'

II. Now note, secondly, the all-powerful motive.

Probably my text is best understood as the Revised Version understands

it, which reads, If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments,' making

it an assurance and not an injunction. Christ speaks with the calm

confidence that love to Him will have power enough to sway the life.

His utterance here is not the addition of another commandment to the

list, but rather the pointing out of how they may all be kept.

The principle that underlies these words, then, is this, that love is

the foundation of obedience, and obedience is the sure outcome and

result of love. That is true in regard to those lower forms of love,

which may teach us something of the operation of the higher. We all

know that love which is real, and not simply passion and selfishness

with a mask on, delights most chiefly in knowing and conforming to the

will of the beloved, and that there is nothing sweeter than to be

commanded by the dear voice and to obey for dear love's sake. And you

have only to take that which is the experience of every true heart, in

a thousand sweet ways in daily life, and to lift it into the higher

region, and to transfer it to the bond that unites us with Jesus

Christ, to see that He has invoked no illusory, but an omnipotent power

when He has rested the whole force of His transforming and sanctifying

energy upon this one principle, If ye love Me, the Lawgiver, ye will

keep the commandments of My Law.'

That is exactly what distinguishes and lifts the morality of the Gospel

above all other systems. The worst man in the world knows a great deal

more of his duty than the best man does. It is not for want of

knowledge that men go to the devil, but it is for want of power or will

to live their knowledge. And what morality fails to do, with its

clearest utterances of human duty, Christ comes and does. The one law

is like the useless proclamations posted up in some rebellious

district, where there is no army to back them, and the king's authority

from whom they come is flouted. The other law gets itself obeyed. Such

is the difference between the powerless morality of the world and the

commandment of Jesus Christ. Here is the road plain and straight. What

matters that, if there is no force to draw the cart along it? There

might as well be no road at all. Here stand all your looms, polished

and in perfect order, but there is no steam in the boilers; and so

there is no motion, and nothing is woven. What we want is not law, but

power, and what the Gospel gives us, and stands alone in giving us, is

not merely the knowledge of the will of God, and the clear revelation

of what we ought to be, but the power to become it.

Love does that, and love alone. That strong force brought into action

in our hearts will drive out from thence all rivals, all false and low

things. The true way to cleanse the Augean stables, as the old myth has

it, was to turn the river into them. It would have been endless work to

wheel out the filth in wheelbarrows loaded by spades: turn the stream

in, and it will sweep away all the foulness. When the Ark comes into

the Temple, Dagon lies, a mutilated stump, upon the threshold. When

Christ comes into my heart, then all the obscene and twilight-loving

shapes that lurked there, and defiled it, will vanish like ghosts at

cock-crowing before His calm and pure Presence. He, and He alone,

entering my heart by the portals of my love, will coerce my evil and

stimulate my good. And if I love Him, I shall keep His commandments.

Now, brethren, here is a plain test and a double-barrelled one, which

tries both our love and our obedience with a sharp touchstone. If ye

love Me, ye will keep My commandments.' That implies, first, that there

is no love worth calling so which does not keep the commandment. All

the emotional and the mystic, and the so-called higher parts of

Christian experience, have to be content to submit to this plain

test--do they help us to live as Christ would have us, and that because

He would have us? Love to Him that does not keep His commandments is

either spurious or dangerously feeble. The true sign of its presence in

the heart and the noblest of its operations is not to be found in

high-pitched expressions of fervid emotion, nor even in the sacred joys

of solitary communion, but in its making us, while in the rough

struggle of daily life, and surrounded by trivial tasks, live near Him,

and by Him, and for Him, and like Him. If I live so, I love Him; if

not, not. Not that I mean to say that in regard to each individual

action of a Christian man's life there must be the conscious presence

of reference to the supreme love, but that each individual action of

the life ought to come from a character of which that reference to the

supreme love is the very formative principle and foundation. The

colouring matter put in at the fountain will dye every drop of the

stream; and they whose inmost hearts are tinged and tinctured with the

sweet love of Jesus Christ, from their hearts will go forth issues of

life all coloured and moulded thereby. Test your Christian love by your

practical obedience.

And, on the other hand, there is no obedience worth calling so which is

not the child of love; and all the multitude of right things which

Christians do without that motive are made short work of by that

consideration. Obedience which is formal, mechanical, matter-of-course,

without the presence in it of a loving submission of the will;

obedience which is reluctant, calculated, forced upon us by dread,

imitated from others--all that is nothing; and Jesus Christ does not

count it as obedience at all. This is a sieve with very small meshes,

and there will be a great deal of rubbish left in it after the shaking.

If ye love Me, keep My commandments.' The keeping of My commandments'

which has not love to Me' underlying it is no keeping at all.

III. And so, lastly, notice the all-subduing gaze.

That is not included in my text, but it is necessary in order to

complete the view of the forces to which Jesus Christ here entrusts the

hallowing of life and the sanctifying of our nature; and we are led to

refer to it by what I have already pointed out; the connection between

the love' of my text and the believe' of the preceding verses. I can

fancy a man saying, Keep His commandments? Woe is me! How am I to

keep?' The answer is Love.' And I can fancy him saying Love?' Yes! And

how am I to love? I cannot get up love at the word of command, or by

any voluntary effort.' And the answer comes again, Believe!' Trust

Christ, and you will love Him. Love Him and you will do His will. And

then the question comes again, Believe what?' And the answer comes,

Believe that He is the Son of God who died for you.'

Nothing else will kindle a man's love than the faithful contemplation

and grasp of Christ in that character and aspect. Only the redeeming

Christ affords a reasonable ground for our love to Him. Here is a dead

man, dead for nineteen centuries, expecting you and me to have towards

Him a vivid personal affection which will influence our conduct and our

character. What right has He to expect that? There is only one

reasonable ground upon which I may be called to love Jesus Christ, and

that is that He died for me, and such a love towards such a Christ is

the only thing which will wield power sufficient to guide, to coerce,

to restrain, to constrain, and to sustain my weak, wayward, rebellious,

and sluggish will. All other emotions of so-called admiration and

worship and reverence and affection for Jesus Christ are apt to be

tepid; but this one has power and warmth in it.

Here is a unique fact in the history of the world, that not only did He

make this astounding claim upon all subsequent generations; but that

all subsequent generations have responded to it, and that to-day there

are millions of men who love Jesus Christ with a love warm, personal,

deep, powerful--the spring of all their goodness and the Lord of their

lives. Why do they? For one reason only. Because they believe that He

died for them individually, and that He lives an ascended yet

ever-present Helper and Lover of their souls.

My brethren, that conviction, and that conviction only, as I venture to

affirm, has power to send a glow of love into the heart which will move

all the limbs in swift and happy obedience. That conviction, and that

conviction alone, will melt the thick-ribbed ice of our spirits and

will make it flow down in sweet waters. The love that has looked upon

the Cross will be the fulfilling of the law of Him that speaks from the

Throne. When our faith has grasped Him, as enduring that cross for us,

then our love will be awakened to hear and to do His commandments.

We love Him because He first loved us,' and such love will flower and

fruit in obedience. I shall keep His commandments when I love Him. I

shall love Him with a love that makes my will plastic and my life a

glad service, when by faith I grasp Him as the Incarnate Lord, who

loved me and gave Himself for me.'

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THE COMFORTER GIVEN

And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter,

that He may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of Truth; whom the

world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him:

but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.'--JOHN

xiv. 16, 17.

The and' at the beginning of these words shows us that they are

continuous with and the consequence of what precedes. If ye love Me, ye

will keep My commandments, and I will pray . . . and He will send.'

Such is the series; but we must also remember that, as we have seen in

previous sermons, the obedience spoken of in the clause before my text

is itself treated as a consequence of some preceding steps. The ladder

that is fixed upon earth and has its summit in heaven has for its

rungs, first and lowest, believe'; second, love'; third, obey.' And

thus the context carries us from the very basis of the Christian life

up into its highest reward, even the larger gift to an obedient spirit

of that Great Spirit, who is the Comforter and the Teacher.

And there is another very striking link of connection between these

words and the preceding. There are, if I may so say, two telephones

across the abyss that separates the ascended Christ and us. One of them

is contained in His words, If ye ask anything in My name I will do it';

the other is contained in these words, If ye keep My commandments I

will ask.' Love on this side of the great cleft sets love on the other

side of it in motion in a twofold fashion. If we ask, He does; if we

do, He asks. His action is the answer to our prayers, and His prayers

are the answer to our obedient action. So we have here these

points--the praying Christ and the giving Father; the abiding Gift; the

blind world and the recipient disciples.

I. Note, then, first, the praying Christ and the giving Father.

I will ask and He will give' seems a strange drop from the lofty claims

with which we have become familiar in the earlier verses of this

chapter. Believe in God, believe also in Me'; He that hath seen Me hath

seen the Father'; If ye shall ask anything in My name I will do it';

Keep My commandments.' All these distinctly express, or necessarily

imply, divine nature, prerogatives, and authority. But here the voice

that spake the perfect revelation of God, and gave utterance

authoritatively to the perfect law of life, softens and lowers its

tones in petition; and Jesus Christ joins the rank of the suppliants.

Now common sense tells us that apparently diverse views lying so close

together in one continuous stream of speech cannot have seemed to the

utterer of them to be contradictory; and I venture to affirm that there

is no explanation which does justice to these two sides of Christ's

consciousness--the one all divine and authoritative and lofty, and the

other all lowly and identifying Himself with petitioners and suppliants

everywhere--except the old-fashioned and to-day discredited belief that

He is God manifest in the flesh,' who prays in His Manhood and hears

prayer in His Divinity. The bare humanistic view which emphasises such

utterances as these of my text does not, for the life of it, know what

to do with the other ones, and cannot manage to unite these two images

into a stereoscopic solid. That is reserved for the faith which

believes in the Manhood and in the Deity of our Lord and Saviour.

His intercession is the great hope of the Christian heart. His

intercession is the great activity of His present exalted and glorious

state. His intercession is no mere verbal utterance, nor the

representation to the Father of an alien or a diverse will, but His

intercession, mysterious as it is, and unfathomable to our poor, short

lines and light plummets, must mean this at all events--His continual

activity in presenting before the divine Father, as the motive and

condition of His petition being granted, His own great work upon the

Cross. The High Priest passes within the veil, bearing in His hand the

offering which He has made, and by reason of that offering, and of His

powerful presence before the mercy-seat, all the spiritual gifts which

redeem and regenerate and sanctify humanity are for ever coming forth.

I will pray, and He will give,' is but one way of saying, Seeing then,

that we have a great High Priest over the House of God who is entered

within the veil, let us draw near.'

But I would have you notice how, as is alwa