Expositions of Holy Scripture St John Ch XV to XXI

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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

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

ST. JOHN

Chaps. XV to XXI

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

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THE TRUE VINE

I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me

that beareth not fruit He taketh away; and every branch that beareth

fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are

clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in Me, and I

in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in

the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.'--JOHN xv. 14.

WHAT suggested this lovely parable of the vine and the branches is

equally unimportant and undiscoverable. Many guesses have been made,

and, no doubt, as was the case with almost all our Lord's parables,

some external object gave occasion for it. It is a significant token of

our Lord's calm collectedness, even at that supreme and heart-shaking

moment, that He should have been at leisure to observe, and to use for

His purposes of teaching, something that was present at the instant.

The deep and solemn lessons which He draws, perhaps from some vine by

the wayside, are the richest and sweetest clusters that the vine has

ever grown. The great truth in this chapter, applied in manifold

directions, and viewed in many aspects, is that of the living union

between Christ and those who believe on Him, and the parable of the

vine and the branches affords the foundation for all which follows.

We take the first half of that parable now. It is somewhat difficult to

trace the course of thought in it, but there seems to be, first of all,

the similitude set forth, without explanation or interpretation, in its

most general terms, and then various aspects in which its applications

to Christian duty are taken up and reiterated, I simply follow the

words which I have read for my text.

I. We have then, first, the Vine in the vital unity of all its parts.

I am the True Vine,' of which the material one to which He perhaps

points, is but a shadow and an emblem. The reality lies in Him. We

shall best understand the deep significance and beauty of this thought

if we recur in imagination to some of those great vines which we

sometimes see in royal conservatories, where for hundred of yards the

pliant branches stretch along the espaliers, and yet one life pervades

the whole, from the root, through the crooked stem, right away to the

last leaf at the top of the farthest branch, and reddens and mellows

every cluster, So,' says Christ, between Me and the totality of them

that hold by Me in faith there is one life, passing ever from root

through branches, and ever bearing fruit.'

Let me remind you that this great thought of the unity of life between

Jesus Christ and all that believe upon Him is the familiar teaching of

Scripture, and is set forth by other emblems besides that of the vine,

the queen of the vegetable world; for we have it in the metaphor of the

body and its members, where not only are the many members declared to

be parts of one body, but the name of the collective body, made up of

many members, is Christ. So also is'--not as we might expect, the

Church,' but--Christ,' the whole bearing the name of Him who is the

Source of life to every part. Personality remains, individuality

remains: I am I, and He is He, and thou art thou; but across the awful

gulf of individual consciousness which parts us from one another, Jesus

Christ assumes the Divine prerogative of passing and joining Himself to

each of us, if we love Him and trust Him, in a union so close, and with

a communication of life so real, that every other union which we know

is but a faint and far-off adumbration of it. A oneness of life from

root to branch, which is the sole cause of fruitfulness and growth, is

taught us here.

And then let me remind you that that living unity between Jesus Christ

and all who love Him is a oneness which necessarily results in oneness

of relation to God and men, in oneness of character, and in oneness of

destiny. In relation to God, He is the Son, and we in Him receive the

standing of sons. He has access ever into the Father's presence, and we

through Him and in Him have access with confidence and are accepted in

the Beloved. In relation to men, since He is Light, we, touched with

His light, are also, in our measure and degree, the lights of the

world; and in the proportion in which we receive into our souls, by

patient abiding in Jesus Christ, the very power of His Spirit, we, too,

become God's anointed, subordinately but truly His messiahs, for He

Himself says: As the Father hath sent Me, even so I send you.'

In regard to character, the living union between Christ and His members

results in a similarity if not identity of character, and with His

righteousness we are clothed, and by that righteousness we are

justified, and by that righteousness we are sanctified. The oneness

between Christ and His children is the ground at once of their

forgiveness and acceptance, and of all virtue and nobleness of life and

conduct that can ever be theirs.

And, in like manner, we can look forward and be sure that we are so

closely joined with Him, if we love Him and trust Him, that it is

impossible but that where He is there shall also His servants be; and

that what He is that shall also His servants be. For the oneness of

life, by which we are delivered from the bondage of corruption and the

law of sin and death here, will never halt nor cease until it brings us

into the unity of His glory, the measure of the stature of the fullness

of Christ.' And as He sits on the Father's throne, His children must

needs sit with Him, on His throne.

Therefore the name of the collective whole, of which the individual

Christian is part, is Christ. And as in the great Old Testament

prophecy of the Servant of the Lord, the figure that rises before

Isaiah's vision fluctuates between that which is clearly the collective

Israel and that which is, as clearly, the personal Messiah; so the

Christ' is not only the individual Redeemer who bears the body of the

flesh literally here upon earth, but the whole of that redeemed Church,

of which it is said, It is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth

all in all.'

II. Now note, secondly, the Husbandman, and the dressing of the vine.

The one tool that a vinedresser needs is a knife. The chief secret of

culture is merciless pruning. And so says my text, The Father is the

Husbandman.' Our Lord assumes that office in other of His parables. But

here the exigencies of the parabolic form require that the office of

Cultivator should be assigned only to the Father; although we are not

to forget that the Father, in that office, works through and in His

Son.

But we should note that the one kind of husbandry spoken of here is

pruning--not manuring, not digging, but simply the hacking away of all

that is rank and all that is dead.

Were you ever in a greenhouse or in a vineyard at the season of cutting

back the vines? What flagitious waste it would seem to an ignorant

person to see scattered on the floor the bright green leaves and the

incipient clusters, and to look up at the bare stem, bleeding at a

hundred points from the sharp steel. Yes! But there was not a random

stroke in it all, and there was nothing cut away which it was not loss

to keep and gain to lose; and it was all done artistically,

scientifically, for a set purpose--that the plant might bring forth

more fruit.

Thus, says Christ, the main thing that is needed--not, indeed, to

improve the life in the branches, but to improve the branches in which

the life is--is excision. There are two forms of it given

here--absolutely dead wood has to be cut out; wood that has life in it,

but which has also rank shoots, that do not come from the all-pervading

and hallowed life, has to be pruned back and deprived of its shoots.

It seems to me that the very language of the metaphor before us

requires us to interpret the fruitless branches as meaning all those

who have a mere superficial, external adherence to the True Vine. For,

according to the whole teaching of the parable, if there be any real

union, there will be some life, and if there be any life, there will be

some fruit, and, therefore, the branch that has no fruit has no life,

because it has no real union. And so the application, as I take it, is

necessarily to those professing Christians, nominal adherents to

Christianity or to Christ's Church, people that come to church and

chapel, and if you ask them to put down in the census paper what they

are, will say that they are Christians--Churchmen or Dissenters, as the

case may be--but who have no real hold upon Jesus Christ, and no real

reception of anything from Him; and the taking away' is simply that,

somehow or other, God makes visible, what is a fact, that they do not

belong to Him with whom they have this nominal connection.

The longer Christianity continues in any country, the more does the

Church get weighted and lowered in its temperature by the aggregation

round about it of people of that sort. And one sometimes longs and

prays for a storm to come, of some sort or other, to blow the dead wood

out of the tree, and to get rid of all this oppressive and stifling

weight of sham Christians that has come round every one of our

churches. His fan is in His hand, and He will throughly purge His

floor,' and every man that has any reality of Christian life in him

should pray that this pruning and cutting out of the dead wood may be

done, and that He would come as a refiner's fire and purify' His

priesthood.

Then there is the other side, the pruning of the fruitful branches. We

all, in our Christian life, carry with us the two natures--our own poor

miserable selves, and the better life of Jesus Christ within us. The

one flourishes at the expense of the other; and it is the Husbandman's

merciful, though painful work, to cut back unsparingly the rank shoots

that come from self, in order that all the force of our lives may be

flung into the growing of the cluster which is acceptable to Him.

So, dear friends, let us understand the meaning of all that comes to

us. The knife is sharp and the tendrils bleed, and things that seem

very beautiful and very precious are unsparingly shorn away, and we are

left bare, and, as it seems to ourselves, impoverished. But Oh! it is

all sent that we may fling our force into the production of fruit unto

God. And no stroke will be a stroke too many or too deep if it helps us

to that. Only let us take care that we do not let regrets for the

vanished good harm us just as much as joy in the present good did, and

let us rather, in humble submission of will to His merciful knife, say

to Him, Cut to the quick, Lord, if only thereby my fruit unto Thee may

increase.'

III. Lastly, we have here the branches abiding in the Vine, and

therefore fruitful.

Our Lord deals with the little group of His disciples as incipiently

and imperfectly, but really, cleansed through the word which He has

spoken to them,' and gives them His exhortation towards that conduct

through which the cleansing and the union and the fruitfulness will all

be secured. Now ye are clean: abide in Me and I in you. As the branch

cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye

except ye abide in Me.'

Union with Christ is the condition of all fruitfulness. There may be

plenty of activity and yet barrenness. Works are not fruit. We can

bring forth a great deal of ourselves,' and because it is of ourselves

it is nought. Fruit is possible only on condition of union with Him. He

is the productive source of it all.

There is the great glory and distinctive blessedness of the Gospel.

Other teachers come to us and tell us how we ought to live, and give us

laws, patterns and examples, reasons and motives for pure and noble

lives. The Gospel comes and gives us life, if we will take it, and

unfolds itself in us into all the virtues that we have to possess. What

is the use of giving a man a copy if he cannot copy it? Morality comes

and stands over the cripple, and says to him, Look here! This is how

you ought to walk,' and he lies there, paralysed and crippled, after as

before the exhibition of what graceful progression is. But Christianity

comes and bends over him, and lays hold of his hand, and says, In the

name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk,' and his feet and

ankle bones receive strength, and he leaps, and walks, and praises

God.' Christ gives more than commandments, patterns, motives; He gives

the power to live soberly, righteously, and godly, and in Him alone is

that power to be found.

Then note that our reception of that power depends upon our own

efforts. Abide in Me and I in you.' Is that last clause a commandment

as well as the first? How can His abiding in us be a duty incumbent

upon us? But it is. And we might paraphrase the intention of this

imperative in its two halves, by--Do you take care that you abide in

Christ, and that Christ abides in you. The two ideas are but two sides

of the one great sphere; they complement and do not contradict each

other. We dwell in Him as the part does in the whole, as the branch

does in the vine, recipient of its life and fruit-bearing energy. He

dwells in us as the whole does in the part, as the vine dwells in the

branch, communicating its energy to every part; or as the soul does in

the body, being alive equally in every part, though it be sight in the

eyeball, and hearing in the ear, and colour in the cheek, and strength

in the hand, and swiftness in the foot.

Abide in Me and I in you.' So we come down to very plain, practical

exhortations. Dear brethren, suppress yourselves, and empty your lives

of self, that the life of Christ may come in. A lock upon a canal, if

it is empty, will have its gates pressed open by the water in the canal

and will be filled. Empty the heart and Christ will come in. Abide in

Him' by continual direction of thought, love, desire to Him; by

continual and reiterated submission of the will to Him, as commanding

and as appointing; by the honest reference to Him of daily life and all

petty duties which otherwise distract us and draw us away from Him.

Then, dwelling in Him we shall share in His life, and shall bring forth

fruit to His praise.

Here is encouragement for us all. To all of us, sometimes, our lives

seem barren and poor; and we feel as if we had brought forth no fruit

to perfection. Let us get nearer to Him and He will see to the fruit.

Some poor stranded sea-creature on the beach, vainly floundering in the

pools, is at the point of death; but the great tide comes, leaping and

rushing over the sands, and bears it away out into the middle deeps for

renewed activity and joyous life. Let the flood of Christ's life bear

you on its bosom, and you will rejoice and expatiate therein.

Here is a lesson of solemn warning to professing Christians. The lofty

mysticism and inward life in Jesus Christ all terminate at last in

simple, practical obedience; and the fruit is the test of the life.

Depart from Me, I never knew you, ye that work iniquity.'

And here is a lesson of solemn appeal to us all. Our only opportunity

of bearing any fruit worthy of our natures and of God's purpose

concerning us is by vital union with Jesus Christ. If we have not that,

there may be plenty of activity and mountains of work in our lives, but

there will be no fruit. Only that is fruit which pleases God and is

conformed to His purpose concerning us, and all the rest of our busy

doings is no more the fruit a man should bear than cankers are roses,

or than oak-galls are acorns. They are but the work of a creeping grub,

and diseased excrescences that suck into themselves the juices that

should swell the fruit. Open your hearts to Christ and let His life and

His Spirit come into you, and then you will have your fruit unto

holiness, and the end everlasting life.'

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THE TRUE BRANCHES OF THE TRUE VINE

I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in

him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do

nothing. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is

withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they

are burned. If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask

what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is My Father

glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples.'--JOHN

xv. 5-8.

No wise teacher is ever afraid of repeating himself. The average mind

requires the reiteration of truth before it can make that truth its

own. One coat of paint is not enough, it soon rubs off. Especially is

this true in regard to lofty spiritual and religious truth, remote from

men's ordinary thinkings, and in some senses unwelcome to them. So our

Lord, the great Teacher, never shrank from repeating His lessons when

He saw that they were but partially apprehended. It was not grievous to

Him to say the same things,' because for them it was safe. He broke the

bread of life into small pieces, and fed them little and often.

So here, in the verses that we have to consider now, we have the

repetition, and yet not the mere repetition, of the great parable of

the vine, as teaching the union of Christians with Christ, and their

consequent fruitfulness. He saw, no doubt, that the truth was but

partially dawning upon His disciples' minds. Therefore He said it all

over again, with deepened meaning, following it out into new

applications, presenting further consequences, and, above all, giving

it a more sharp and definite personal application.

Are we any swifter scholars than these first ones were? Have we

absorbed into our own thinking this truth so thoroughly and constantly,

and wrought it out in our lives so completely, that we do not need to

be reminded of it any more? Shall we not be wise if we faithfully

listen to His repeated teachings?

The verses which I have read give us four aspects of this great truth

of union with Jesus Christ; or of its converse, separation from Him.

There is, first, the fruitfulness of union; second, the withering and

destruction of separation; third, the satisfaction of desire which

comes from abiding in Christ; and, lastly, the great, noble issue of

fruitfulness, in God's glory, and our own increasing discipleship. Now

let me touch upon these briefly.

I. First, then, our Lord sets forth, with no mere repetition, the same

broad idea which He has already been insisting upon--viz., that union

with Him is sure to issue in fruitfulness. He repeats the theme, I am

the Vine'; but He points its application by the next clause, Ye are the

branches.' That had been implied before, but it needed to be said more

definitely. For are we not all too apt to think of religious truth as

swinging in vacuo as it were, with no personal application to

ourselves, and is not the one thing needful in regard to the truths

which are most familiar to us, to bring them into close connection with

our own personal life and experience?

I am the Vine' is a general truth, with no clear personal application.

Ye are the branches' brings each individual listener into connection

with it. How many of us there are, as there are in every so-called

Christian communion, that listen pleasedly, and, in a fitful sort of

languid way, interestedly, to the most glorious and most solemn words

that come from a preacher's lips, and never dream that what he has been

saying has any bearing upon themselves! And the one thing that is most

of all needed with people like some of you, who have been listening to

the truth all your days, is that it should be sharpened to a point, and

the conviction driven into you, that you have some personal concern in

this great message. Ye are the branches' is the one side of that

sharpening and making definite of the truth in its personal

application, and the other side is, Thou art the man.' All preaching

and religious teaching is toothless generality, utterly useless, unless

we can manage somehow or other to force it through the wall of

indifference and vague assent to a general proposition, with which

Gospel-hardened hearers' surround themselves, and make them feel that

the thing has got a point, and that the point is touching their own

consciousness. Ye are the branches.'

Note next the great promise of fruitfulness. He that abideth in Me, and

I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.'

I need not repeat what I have said in former sermons as to the plain,

practical duties which are included in that abiding in Christ, and

Christ's consequent abiding in us. It means, on the part of professedly

Christian people, a temper and tone of mind very far remote from the

noisy, bustling distractions too common in our present Christianity. We

want quiet, patient waiting within the veil. We want stillness of

heart, brought about by our own distinct effort to put away from

ourselves the strife of tongues and the pride of life. We want

activity, no doubt, but we want a wise passiveness as its foundation.

Think you, midst all this mighty sum

Of things for ever speaking,

That nothing of itself will come,

But we must still be seeking?'

Get away into the secret place of the Most High,' and rise into a

higher altitude and atmosphere than the region of work and effort; and

sitting still with Christ, let His love and His power pour themselves

into your hearts. Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers and

shut thy doors about thee.' Get away from the jangling of politics, and

empty controversies and busy distractions of daily duty. The harder our

toil necessarily is, the more let us see to it that we keep a little

cell within the central life where in silence we hold communion with

the Master. Abide in Me and I in you.'

That is the way to be fruitful, rather than by efforts after individual

acts of conformity and obedience, howsoever needful and precious these

are. There is a deeper thing wanted than these. The best way to secure

Christian conduct is to cultivate communion with Christ. It is better

to work at the increase of the central force than at the improvement of

the circumferential manifestations of it. Get more of the sap into the

branch, and there will be more fruit. Have more of the life of Christ

in the soul, and the conduct and the speech will be more Christlike. We

may cultivate individual graces at the expense of the harmony and

beauty of the whole character. We may grow them artificially and they

will be of little worth--by imitation of others, by special efforts

after special excellence, rather than by general effort after the

central improvement of our nature and therefore of our life. But the

true way to influence conduct is to influence the springs of conduct;

and to make a man's life better, the true way is to make the man

better. First of all be, and then do; first of all receive, and then

give forth; first of all draw near to Christ, and then there will be

fruit to His praise. That is the Christian way of mending men, not

tinkering at this, that, and the other individual excellence, but

grasping the secret of total excellence in communion with Him.

Our Lord is here not merely laying down a law, but giving a promise,

and putting his veracity into pawn for the fulfilment of it. If a man

will keep near Me,' He says, he shall bear fruit.'

Notice that little word which now appears for the first time. He shall

bear much fruit.' We are not to be content with a little fruit; a poor

shrivelled bunch of grapes that are more like marbles than grapes, here

and there, upon the half-nourished stem. The abiding in Him will

produce a character rich in manifold graces. A little fruit' is not

contemplated by Christ at all. God forbid that I should say that there

is no possibility of union with Christ and a little fruit. Little union

will have little fruit; but I would have you notice that the only two

alternatives which come into Christ's view here are, on the one hand,

no fruit,' and on the other hand, much fruit.' And I would ask why it

is that the average Christian man of this generation bears only a berry

or two here and there, like such as are left upon the vines after the

vintage, when the promise is that if he will abide in Christ, he will

bear much fruit?

This verse, setting forth the fruitfulness of union with Jesus, ends

with the brief, solemn statement of the converse--the barrenness of

separation--Apart from Me' (not merely without,' as the Authorised

Version has it) ye can do nothing.' There is the condemnation of all

the busy life of men which is not lived in union with Jesus Christ. It

is a long row of figures which, like some other long rows of algebraic

symbols added up, amount just to zero. Without me, nothing.' All your

busy life, when you come to sum it up, is made up of plus and minus

quantities, which precisely balance each other, and the net result,

unless you are in Christ, is just nothing; and on your gravestones the

only right epitaph is a great round cypher. He did not do anything.

There is nothing left of his toil; the whole thing has evaporated and

disappeared.' That is life apart from Jesus Christ.

II. And so note, secondly, the withering and destruction following

separation from Him.

Commentators tell us, I think a little prosaically, that when our Lord

spoke, it was the time of pruning the vine in Palestine, and that,

perhaps, as they went from the upper room to the garden, they might see

in the valley, here and there, the fires that the labourers had kindled

in the vineyards to burn the loppings of the vines. That does not

matter. It is of more consequence to notice how the solemn thought of

withering and destruction forces itself, so to speak, into these

gracious words; and how, even at that moment, our Lord, in all His

tenderness and pity, could not but let words of warning--grave, solemn,

tragical--drop from His lips.

This generation does not like to hear them, for its conception of the

Gospel is a thing with no minor notes in it, with no threatenings, a

proclamation of a deliverance, and no proclamation of anything from

which deliverance is needed--which is a strange kind of Gospel! But

Jesus Christ could not speak about the blessedness of fruitfulness and

the joy of life in Himself without speaking about its necessary

converse, the awfulness of separation from Him, of barrenness, of

withering, and of destruction.

Separation is withering. Did you ever see a hawthorn bough that

children bring home from the woods, and stick in the grate; how in a

day or two the little fresh green leaves all shrivel up and the white

blossoms become brown and smell foul, and the only thing to be done

with it is to fling it into the fire and get rid of it? And so,' says

Jesus Christ, as long as a man holds on to Me and the sap comes into

him, he will flourish, and as soon as the connection is broken, all

that was so fair will begin to shrivel, and all that was green will

grow brown and turn to dust, and all that was blossom will droop, and

there will be no more fruit any more for ever.' Separate from Christ,

the individual shrivels, and the possibilities of fair buds wither and

set into no fruit, and no man is the man he might have been unless he

holds by Jesus Christ and lets His life come into him.

And as for individuals, so for communities. The Church or the body of

professing Christians that is separate from Jesus Christ dies to all

noble life, to all high activity, to all Christlike conduct, and, being

dead, rots.

Withering means destruction. The language of our text is a description

of what befalls the actual branches of the literal vine; but it is made

a representation of what befalls the individuals whom these branches

represent, by that added clause, like a branch.' Look at the

mysteriousness of the language. They gather them.' Who? They cast them

into the fire.' Who have the tragic task of flinging the withered

branches into some mysterious fire? All is left vague with unexplained

awfulness. The solemn fact that the withering of manhood by separation

from Jesus Christ requires, and ends in, the consuming of the withered,

is all that we have here. We have to speak of it pityingly, with

reticence, with terror, with tenderness, with awe lest it should be our

fate.

But O, dear brethren! be on your guard against the tendency of the

thinking of this generation, to paste a bit of blank paper over all the

threatenings of the Bible, and to blot out from its consciousness the

grave issues that it holds forth. One of two things must befall the

branch, either it is in the Vine or it gets into the fire. If we would

avoid the fire let us see to it that we are in the Vine.

III. Thirdly, we have here the union with Christ as the condition of

satisfied desires.

If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye

will, and it shall be done unto you.' Notice how our Lord varies His

phraseology here, and instead of saying I in you,' says My words in

you.' He is speaking about prayers, consequently the variation is

natural. In fact, His abiding in us is largely the abiding of His words

in us; or, to speak more accurately, the abiding of His words in us is

largely the means of His abiding in us.

What is meant by Christ's words abiding in us? Something a great deal

more than the mere intellectual acceptance of them. Something very

different from reading a verse of the Gospels of a morning before we go

to our work, and forgetting all about it all the day long; something

very different from coming in contact with Christian truth on a Sunday,

when somebody else preaches to us what he has found in the Bible, and

we take in a little of it. It means the whole of the conscious nature

of a man being, so to speak, saturated with Christ's words; his

desires, his understanding, his affections, his will, all being steeped

in these great truths which the Master spoke. Put a little bit of

colouring matter into the fountain at its source, and you will have the

stream dyed down its course for ever so far. See that Christ's words be

lodged in your inmost selves, by patient meditation upon them, by

continual recurrence to them, and all your life will be glorified and

flash into richness of colouring and beauty by their presence.

The main effect of such abiding of the Lord's words in us which our

Lord touches upon here is, that in such a case, if our whole inward

nature is influenced by the continual operation upon it of the words of

the Lord, then our desires will be granted. Do not so vulgarise and

lower the nobleness and the loftiness of this great promise as to

suppose that it only means--If you remember His words you will get

anything you like. It means something a great deal better than that. It

means that if Christ's words are the substratum, so to speak, of your

wishes, then your wishes will harmonise with His will, and so ye shall

ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.'

Christ loves us a great deal too well to give to our own foolish and

selfish wills the keys of His treasure-house. The condition of our

getting what we will is our willing what He desires; and unless our

prayers are a great deal more the utterance of the submission of our

wills to His than they are the attempt to impose ours upon Him, they

will not be answered. We get our wishes when our wishes are moulded by

His word.

IV. The last thought that is here is that this union and fruitfulness

lead to the noble ends of glorifying God and increasing discipleship.

Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.' Christ's life

was all for the glorifying of God. The lives which are ours in

name--but being drawn from Him, in their depths are much rather the

life of Christ in us than our lives--will have the same end and the

same issue.

Ah, dear brethren, we come here to a very sharp test for us all. I

wonder how many of us there are, on whom men looking think more loftily

of God and love Him better, and are drawn to Him by strange longings.

How many of us are there about whom people will say, There must be

something in the religion that makes a man like that'? How many of us

are there, to look upon whom suggests to men that God, who can make

such a man, must be infinitely sweet and lovely? And yet that is what

we should all be--mirrors of the divine radiance, on which some eyes,

that are too dim and sore to bear the light as it streams from the Sun,

may look, and, beholding the reflection, may learn to love. Does God so

shine in me that I lead men to magnify His name? If I am dwelling with

Christ it will be so.

I shall not know it. Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone';

but, in meek unconsciousness of the glory that rays from us, we may

walk the earth, reflecting the light and making God known to our

fellows.

And if thus we abide in Him and bear fruit we shall be' or (as the word

might more accurately be rendered), we shall become His disciples.' The

end of our discipleship is never reached on earth: we never so much are

as we are in the process of becoming, His true followers and servants.

If we bear fruit because we are knit to Him, the fruit itself will help

us to get nearer Him, and so to be more His disciples and more

fruitful. Character produces conduct, but conduct rests on character,

and strengthens the impulses from which it springs. And thus our action

as Christian men and women will tell upon our inward lives as

Christians, and the more our outward conduct is conformed to the

pattern of Jesus Christ, the more shall we love Him in our inmost

hearts. We ourselves shall eat of the fruit which we ourselves have

borne to Him.

The alternatives are before us--in Christ, living and fruitful; out of

Christ, barren, and destined to be burned. As the prophet says, Will

men take of the wood of the vine for any work?' Vine-wood is worthless,

its only use is to bear fruit; and if it does not do that, there is

only one thing to be done with it, and that is, They cast it into the

fire, and it is burned.'

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ABIDING IN LOVE

As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye In My

love. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I

have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things

have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your

joy might be full.'--JOHN xv. 9-11.

The last of these verses shows that they are to be taken as a kind of

conclusion of the great parable of the Vine and the branches, for it

looks back and declares Christ's purpose in His preceding utterances.

The parable proper is ended, but the thoughts of it still linger in our

Lord's mind, and echo through His words, as the vibration of some great

bell after the stroke has ceased. The main thoughts of the parable were

these two, that participation in Christ's life was the source of all

good, and that abiding in Him was the means of participation in His

life. And these same thoughts, though modified in their form, and free

from the parabolical element, appear in the words that we have to

consider on this occasion. The parable spoke about abiding in Christ;

our text defines that abiding, and makes it still more tender and

gracious by substituting for it, abiding in His love.' The parable

spoke of conduct as fruit,' the effortless result of communion with

Jesus. Our text speaks of it with more emphasis laid on the human side,

as keeping the commandments.' The parable told us that abiding in

Christ was the condition of bearing fruit. Our text tells us the

converse, which is also true, that bearing fruit, or keeping the

commandments, is the condition of abiding in Christ. So our Lord takes

His thought, as it were, and turns it round before us, letting us see

both sides of it, and then tells us that He does all this for one

purpose, which in itself is a token of His love, namely, that our

hearts may be filled with perfect and perennial joy, a drop from the

fountain of His own.

These three verses have three words which may be taken as their

key-notes--love, obedience, joy. We shall look at them in that order.

I. First, then, we have here the love in which it is our sweet duty to

abide. As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide ye in My

love.'

What shall we say about these mysterious and profound first words of

this verse? They carry us into the very depths of divinity, and suggest

for us that wonderful analogy between the relation of the Father to the

Son, and that of the Son to His disciples, which appears over and over

again in the solemnities of these last hours and words of Jesus. Christ

here claims to be, in a unique and solitary fashion, the Object of the

Father's love, and He claims to be able to love like God. As the Father

hath loved Me, so have I loved you'; as deeply, as purely, as fully, as

eternally, and with all the unnameable perfectnesses which must belong

to the divine affection, does Christ declare that He loves us.

I know not whether the majesty and uniqueness of His nature stand out

more clearly in the one or in the other of these two assertions. As

beloved of God, and as loving like God, He equally claims for Himself a

place which none other can fill, and declares that the love which falls

on us from His pierced and bleeding heart is really the love of God.

In this mysterious, awful, tender, perfect affection He exhorts us to

abide. That comes yet closer to our hearts than the other phrase of

which it is the modification, and in some sense the explanation. The

command to abide in Him suggests much that is blessed, but to have all

that mysterious abiding in Him resolved into abiding in His love is

infinitely tenderer, and draws us still closer to Himself. Obviously,

what is meant is not our continuance in the attitude of love to Him,

but rather our continuance in the sweet and sacred atmosphere of His

love to us. For the connection between the two halves of the verse

necessarily requires that the love in which we are to abide should be

identical with the love which had been previously spoken of, and that

is clearly His love to us, and not ours to Him. But then, on the other

hand, whosoever thus abides in Christ's love to Him will echo it back

again, in an equally continuous love to Him. So that the two things

flow together, and to abide in the conscious possession of Christ's

love to me is the certain and inseparable cause of its effect, my

abiding in the continual exercise and outgoing of my love to Him.

Now note that this continuance in Christ's love is a thing in our

power, since it is commanded. Although it is His affection to us of

which my text primarily speaks, I can so modify and regulate the flow

of that divine love to my heart that it becomes my duty to continue in

Christ's love to me.

What a quiet, blessed home that is for us! The image, I suppose, that

underlies all this sweet speech in these last hours, about dwelling in

Christ, in His joy, in His words, in His peace, and the like, is that

of some safe house, into which going, we may be secure. And what sorrow

or care or trouble or temptation would be able to reach us if we were

folded in the protection of that strong love, and always felt that it

was the fortress into which we might continually resort? They who make

their abode there, and dwell behind those firm bastions, need fear no

foes, but are lifted high above them all. Abide in My love,' for they

who dwell within the clefts of that Rock need none other defence; and

they to whom the riven heart of Christ is the place of their abode are

safe, whatsoever befalls. As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved

you. Abide ye in My love.'

II. Now note, secondly, the obedience by which we continue in Christ's

love.

The analogy, on which He has already touched, is still continued. If ye

keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My

Father's commandments and abide in His love.' Note that Christ here

claims for Himself absolute and unbroken conformity with the Father's

will, and consequent uninterrupted and complete communion with the

Father's love. It is the utterance of a nature conscious of no sin, of

a humanity that never knew one instant's film of separation, howsoever

thin, howsoever brief, between Him and the Father. No more tremendous

words were ever spoken than these quiet ones in which Jesus Christ

declares that never, all His life long, had there been the smallest

deflection or want of conformity between the Father's will and His

desires and doings, and that never had there been one grain of dust, as

it were, between the two polished plates which adhered so closely in

inseparable union of harmony and love.

And then notice, still further, how Christ here, with His consciousness

of perfect obedience and communion, intercepts our obedience and

diverts it to Himself. He does not say, Obey God as I have done, and He

will love you'; but He says, Obey Me as I obey God, and I will love

you.' Who is this that thus comes between the child's heart and the

Father's? Does He come between when He stands thus? or does He rather

lead us up to the Father, and to a share in His own filial obedience?

He further assures us that, by keeping His commandments, we shall

continue in that sweet home and safe stronghold of His love. Of course

the keeping of the commandments is something more than mere outward

conformity by action. It is the inward harmony of will, and the bowing

of the whole nature. It is, in fact, the same thing (though considered

under a different aspect, and from a somewhat different point of view),

as He has already been speaking about as the fruit' of the vine, by the

bearing of which the Father is glorified. And this obedience, the

obedience of the hands because the heart obeys, and does so because it

loves, the bowing of the will in glad submission to the loved and holy

will of the heavens--this obedience is the condition of our continuing

in Christ's love.

He will love us better, the more we obey His commandments, for although

His tender heart is charged towards all, even the disobedient, with the

love of pity and of desire to help, He cannot but feel a growing thrill

of satisfied and gratified affection towards us, in the measure in

which we become like Himself. The love that wept over us, when we were

enemies, will rejoice over us with singing,' when we are friends. The

love that sought the sheep when it was wandering will pour itself yet

more tenderly and with selector gifts upon it when it follows in the

footsteps of the flock, and keeps close at the heels of the Good

Shepherd. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love,' so we

will put nothing between us and Him which will make it impossible for

the tenderest tenderness of that holy love to come to your hearts.

The obedience which we render for love's sake will make us more capable

of receiving, and more blessedly conscious of possessing, the love of

Jesus Christ. The lightest cloud before the sun will prevent it from

focussing its rays to a burning point on the convex glass. And the

small, thin, fleeting, scarcely visible acts of self-will that

sometimes pass across our skies will prevent our feeling the warmth of

that love upon our shrouded hearts. Every known piece of rebellion

against Christ will shatter all true enjoyment of His favour, unless we

are hopeless hypocrites or self-deceived. The condition of knowing and

feeling the warmth and blessedness of Christ's love to me is the honest

submission of my nature to His commandments. You cannot rejoice in

Jesus Christ unless you do His will. You will have no real comfort and

blessedness in your religion unless it works itself out in your daily

lives. That is why so many of you know nothing, or next to nothing,

about the joy of Christ's felt presence, because you do not, for all

your professions, hourly and momentarily regulate and submit your wills

to His commandments. Do what He wants, and do it because He wants it,

if you wish that His love should fill your hearts.

And, further, we shall continue in His love by obedience, inasmuch as

every emotion which finds expression in our daily life is strengthened

by the fact that it is expressed. The love which works is love which

grows, and the tree that bears fruit is the tree that is healthy and

increases. So note how all these deepest things of Christian teaching

come at last to a plain piece of practical duty. We talk about the

mysticism of John's Gospel, about the depth of these last sayings of

Jesus Christ. Yes! they are mystical, they are deep--unfathomably deep,

thank God!--but connected by the shortest possible road with the

plainest possible duties. Let no man deceive you. He that doeth

righteousness is righteous.' It is of no use to talk about communion

with Jesus Christ, and abiding in Him, in possession of His love, and

all those other properly mystical sides of Christian experience, unless

you verify them for yourselves by the plain way of practice. Doing as

Christ bids us, and doing that habitually, and doing it gladly, then,

and only then, are we in no danger of losing ourselves on the heights,

or of forgetting that Christ's mission has for its last result the

influencing of character and of conduct. If ye keep My commandments, ye

shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments,

and abide in His love.'

III. Lastly, note the joy which follows on this practical obedience.

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain,' (or

might be') in you, and that your joy might be full.'

My joy might be in you'--a strange time to talk of His joy.' In half an

hour he would be in Gethsemane, and we know what happened there. Was

Christ a joyful man? He was a Man of sorrows' but one of the old Psalms

says, Thou hast loved righteousness . . . therefore God hath anointed

Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.' The deep truth that

lies there is the same that He here claims as being fulfilled in His

own experience, that absolute surrender and submission in love to the

beloved commands of a loving Father made Him--in spite of sorrows, in

spite of the baptism with which He was baptized, in spite of all the

burden and the weight of our sins--the most joyful of men.

This joy He offers to us, a joy coming from perfect obedience, a joy

coming from a surrender of self at the bidding of love, to a love that

to us seems absolutely good and sweet. There is no joy that humanity is

capable of to compare for a moment with that bright, warm, continuous

sunshine which floods the soul, that is freed from all the clouds and

mists of self and the darkness of sin. Self-sacrifice at the bidding of

Jesus Christ is the recipe for the highest, the most exquisite, the

most godlike gladnesses of which the human heart is capable. Our joy

will remain if His joy is ours. Then our joy will be, up to the measure

of its capacity, ennobled, and filled, and progressive, advancing ever

towards a fuller possession of His joy, and a deeper calm of that pure

and perennial rapture, which makes the settled and celestial bliss of

those who have entered into the joy of their Lord.'

Brother! there is only one gladness that is worth calling so--and that

is, that which comes to us, when we give ourselves utterly away to

Jesus Christ, and let Him do with us as He will. It is better to have a

joy that is central and perennial--though there may be, as there will

be, a surface of sorrow and care--than to have the converse, a surface

of joy, and a black, unsympathetic kernel of aching unrest and sadness.

In one or other of these two states we all live. Either we have to say,

as sorrowful yet always rejoicing' or we have to feel that even in

laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is

heaviness.' Let us choose for ourselves, and let us choose aright, the

gladness which coils round the heart, and endures for ever, and is

found in submission to Jesus Christ, rather than the superficial,

fleeting joys which are rooted on earth and perish with time.

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THE ONENESS OF THE BRANCHES

This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for

his friends.'--JOHN xv. 12, 13.

The union between Christ and His disciples has been tenderly set forth

in the parable of the Vine and the branches. We now turn to the union

between the disciples, which is the consequence of their common union

to the Lord. The branches are parts of one whole, and necessarily bear

a relation to each other. We may modify for our present purpose the

analogous statement of the Apostle in reference to the Lord's Supper,

and as He says, We being many, are one body, for we are all partakers

of that one bread,' so we may say--The branches, being many, are one

Vine, for they are all partakers of that one Vine. Of this union

amongst the branches, which results from their common inherence in the

Vine, the natural expression and manifestation is the mutual love,

which Christ here gives as the commandment, and commends to us all by

His own solemn example.

There are four things suggested to me by the words of our text--the

Obligation, the Sufficiency, the Pattern, and the Motive, of Christian

love.

I. First, the Obligation of love.

The two ideas of commandment and love do not go well together. You

cannot pump up love to order, and if you try you generally produce,

what we see in abundance in the world and in the Church, sentimental

hypocrisy, hollow and unreal. But whilst that is true, and whilst it

seems strange to say that we are commanded to love, still we can do a

great deal, directly and indirectly, for the cultivation and

strengthening of any emotion. We can either cast ourselves into the

attitude which is favourable or unfavourable to it. We can either look

at the facts which will create it or at those who will check it. We can

go about with a sharp eye for the lovable or for the unlovable in man.

We can either consciously war against or lazily acquiesce in our own

predominant self-absorption and selfishness. And in these and in a

number of other ways, our feelings towards other Christian people are

very largely under our own control, and therefore are fitting subjects

for commandment.

Our Lord lays down the obligation which devolves upon all Christian

people, of cherishing a kindly and loving regard to all others who find

their place within the charmed circle of His Church. It is an

obligation because He commands it. He puts Himself here in the position

of the absolute Lawgiver, who has the right of entire and authoritative

control over men's affections and hearts. And it is further obligatory

because such an attitude is the only fitting expression of the mutual

relation of Christian men, through their common relation to the Vine.

If there be the one life-sap circling through all parts of the mighty

whole, how anomalous and how contradictory it is that these parts

should not be harmoniously concordant among themselves! However unlike

any two Christian people are to each other in character, in culture, in

circumstances, the bond that knits those who have the same relations to

Jesus Christ one to another is far deeper, far more real, and ought to

be far closer, than the bond that knits either of them to the men or

women to whom they are likest in all these other respects, and to whom

they are unlike in this central one. Christian men! you are closer to

every other Christian man, down in the depths of your being, however he

may be differenced from you by things that are very hard to get over,

than you are to the people that you like best, and love most, if they

do not participate with you in this common love to Jesus Christ.

I dread talking mere sentiment about this matter, for there is perhaps

no part of Christian duty which has been so vulgarised and pawed over

by mere unctuous talk, as that of the fellowship that should subsist

between all Christians. But I have one plain question to put,--Does

anybody believe that the present condition of Christendom, and the

relations to one another even of good Christian people in the various

churches and communions of our own and of other lands, is the sort of

thing that Jesus Christ meant, or is anything like a fair and adequate

representation of the deep, essential unity that knits us all together?

We need far more to realise the fact that our emotions towards our

brother Christians are not matters in which our own inclinations may

have their way, but that there is a simple commandment given to us, and

that we are bound to cherish love to every man who loves Jesus Christ.

Never mind though he does not hold your theology; never mind though he

be very ignorant and narrow as compared with you; never mind though

your outlook on the world may be entirely unlike his. Never mind though

you be a rich man and he a poor one, or you a poor one and he rich,

which is just as hard to get over. Let all these secondary grounds of

union and of separation be relegated to their proper subordinate place;

and let us recognise this, that the children of one Father are

brethren. And do not let it be possible that it shall be said, as so

often has been said, and said truly, that brethren' in the Church means

a great deal less than brothers in the world. Lift your eyes beyond the

walls of the little sheepfold in which you live, and hearken to the

bleating of the flocks away out yonder, and feel--Other sheep He has

which are not of this fold'; and recognise the solemn obligation of the

commandment of love.

II. Note, secondly, the Sufficiency of love.

Our Lord has been speaking in a former verse about the keeping of His

commandments. Now He gathers them all up into one. This is my

commandment, that ye love one another' All duties to our fellows, and

all duties to our brethren, are summed up in, or resolved into, this

one germinal, encyclopaediacal, all-comprehensive simplification of

duty, into the one word love.'

Where the heart is right the conduct will be right. Love will soften

the tones, will instinctively teach what we ought to be and do; will

take the bitterness out of opposition and diversity, will make even

rebuke, when needful, only a form of expressing itself. If the heart be

right all else will be right; and if there be a deficiency of love

nothing will be right. You cannot help anybody except on condition of

having an honest, beneficent, and benevolent regard towards him. You

cannot do any man in the world any good unless there is a shoot of love

in your heart towards him. You may pitch him benefits, and you will

neither get nor deserve thanks for them; you may try to teach him, and

your words will be hopeless and profitless. The one thing that is

required to bind Christian men together is this common affection. That

being there, everything will come. It is the germ out of which all is

developed. As we read in that great chapter to the Corinthians--the

lyric praise of Charity,--all kinds of blessing and sweetness and

gladness come out of this, It is the central force which, being

present, secures that all shall be right, which, being absent, ensures

that all shall be wrong.

And is it not beautiful to see how Jesus Christ, leaving the little

flock of His followers in the world, gave them no other instruction for

their mutual relationship? He did not instruct them about institutions

and organisations, about orders of the ministry and sacraments, or

Church polity and the like. He knew that all these would come. His one

commandment was, Love one another,' and that will make you wise. Love

one another, and you will shape yourselves into the right forms. He

knew that they needed no exhortations such as ecclesiastics would have

put in the foreground. It was not worth while to talk to them about

organisations and officers. These would come to them at the right time

and in the right way. The one thing needful' was that they should be

knit together as true participators of His life. Love was sufficient as

their law and as their guide.

III. Note, further, the Pattern of love.

As I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay

down his life for his friends.' Christ sets Himself forward then, here

and in this aspect, as He does in all aspects of human conduct and

character, as being the realised Ideal of them all. And although the

thought is a digression from my present purpose, I cannot but pause for

a moment to reflect upon the strangeness of a man thus calmly saying to

the whole world, I am the embodiment of all that love ought to be. You

cannot get beyond Me, nor have anything more pure, more deep, more

self-sacrificing, more perfect, than the love which I have borne to

you.'

But passing that, the pattern that He proposes for us is even more

august than appears at first sight. For, if you remember, a verse or

two before our Lord had said, As the Father hath loved Me so I have

loved you.' Now He says, Love one another as I have loved you.' There

stand the three, as it were, the Father, the Son, the disciple. The Son

in the midst receives and transmits the Father's love to the disciple,

and the disciple is to love his fellows, in some deep and august sense,

as the Father loved the Son. The divinest thing in God, and that in

which men can be like God, is love. In all our other attitudes to Him

we rather correspond than copy. His fullness is met by our emptiness,

His giving by our recipiency, His faithfulness by our faith, His

command by our obedience, His light by our eye. But here it is not a

case of correspondence only, but of similarity. My faith answers God's

gift to me, but my love is like God's love. Be ye, therefore, imitators

of God as beloved children'; and having received that love into your

hearts, ray it out, and walk in love as God also hath loved us.'

But then our Lord here, in a very wonderful manner, sets forth the very

central point of His work, even His death upon the Cross for us, as

being the pattern to which our poor affection ought to aspire, and

after which it must tend to be conformed. I need not remind you, I

suppose, that our Lord here is not speaking of the propitiatory

character of His death, nor of the issues which depend upon it, and

upon it alone, viz., the redemption and salvation of the world. He is

not speaking, either, of the peculiar and unique sense in which He lays

down His life for us, His friends and brethren, as none other can do.

He is speaking about it simply in its aspect of being a voluntary

surrender, at the bidding of love, for the good of those whom He loved,

and that, He tells us--that, and nothing else--is the true pattern and

model towards which all our love is bound to tend and to aspire. That

is to say, the heart of the love which He commands is self-sacrifice,

reaching to death if death be needful. And no man loves as Christ would

have him love who does not bear in his heart affection which has so

conquered selfishness that, if need be, he is ready to die.

The expression of Christian life is not to be found in honeyed words,

or the indolent indulgence in benevolent emotion, but in

self-sacrifice, modelled after that of Christ's sacrificial death,

which is imitable by us.

Brethren, it is a solemn obligation, which may well make us tremble,

that is laid on us in these words, As I have loved you.' Calvary was

less than twenty-four hours off, and He says to us, That is your

pattern!' Contrast our love at its height with His--a drop to an ocean,

a poor little flickering rushlight held up beside the sun. My love, at

its best, has so far conquered my selfishness that now and then I am

ready to suffer a little inconvenience, to sacrifice a little leisure,

to give away a little money, to spend a little dribble of sympathy upon

the people who are its objects. Christ's love nailed Him to the Cross,

and led Him down from the throne, and shut for a time the gates of the

glory behind Him. And He says, That is your pattern!'

Oh, let us bow down and confess how His word, which commands us, puts

us to shame, when we think of how miserably we have obeyed.

Remember, too, that the restriction which here seems to be cast around

the flow of His love is not a restriction in reality, but rather a

deepening of it. He says, Greater love hath no man than this, that a

man lay down his life for his friends.' But evidently He calls them so

from His point of view, and as He sees them, not from their point of

view, as they see Him--that is to say, He means by friends' not those

who love Him, but those whom He loves. The friends' for whom He dies

are the same persons as the Apostle, in his sweet variation upon the

words of my text, has called by the opposite name, when He says that He

died for His enemies.'

There is an old, wild ballad that tells of how a knight found, coiling

round a tree in a dismal forest, a loathly dragon breathing out poison;

and how, undeterred by its hideousness and foulness, he cast his arms

round it and kissed it on the mouth. Three times he did it undisgusted,

and at the third the shape changed into a fair lady, and he won his

bride. Christ kisses with the kisses of His mouth' His enemies, and

makes them His friends because He loves them. If He had never died for

His enemies' says one of the old fathers, He would never have possessed

His friends.' And so He teaches us here in what seems to be a

restriction of the purpose of His death and the sweep of His love, that

the way by which we are to meet even alienation and hostility is by

pouring upon it the treasures of an unselfish, self-sacrificing

affection which will conquer at the last.

Christ's death is the pattern for our lives as well as the hope of our

hearts.

IV. Lastly, we have here by implication, though not by direct

statement, the Motive of the love.

Surely that, too, is contained in the words, As I have loved you.'

Christ's commandment of love is a new commandment, not so much because

it is a revelation of a new duty, though it is the casting of an old

duty into new prominence, as because it is not merely a revelation of

an obligation, but the communication of power to fulfil it. The novelty

of Christian morality lies here, that in its law there is a

self-fulfilling force. We have not to look to one place for the

knowledge of our duty, and somewhere else for the strength to do it,

but both are given to us in the one thing, the gift of the dying Christ

and His immortal love.

That love, received into our hearts, will conquer, and it alone will

conquer, our selfishness. That love, received into our hearts, will

mould, and it alone will mould, them into its own likeness. That love,

received into our hearts, will knit, and it alone will knit, all those

who participate in it into a common bond, sweet, deep, sacred, and

all-victorious.

And so, brethren, if we would know the blessedness and the sweetness of

victory over these miserable, selfish hearts of ours, and to walk in

the liberty of love, we can only get it by keeping close to Jesus

Christ. In any circle, the nearer the points of the circumference are

to the centre, the closer they will necessarily be to one another. As

we draw nearer, each for himself, to our Centre, we shall feel that we

have approximated to all those who stand round the same centre, and

draw from it the same life. In the early spring, when the wheat is

green and young, and scarcely appears above the ground, it comes up in

the lines in which it was sown, parted from one another and distinctly

showing their separation and the furrows. But when the full corn in the

ear waves on the autumn plain, all the lines and separations have

disappeared, and there is one unbroken tract of sunny fruitfulness. And

so when the life in Christ is low and feeble, His servants may be

separated and drawn up in rigid lines of denominations, and churches,

and sects; but as they grow the lines disappear. If to the churches of

England to-day there came a sudden accession of knowledge of Christ,

and of union with Him, the first thing that would go would be the

wretched barriers that separate us from one another. For if we have the

life of Christ in any adequate measure in ourselves, we shall certainly

have grown up above the fences behind which we began to grow, and shall

be able to reach out to all that love the Lord Jesus Christ, and feel

with thankfulness that we are one in Him.

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CHRIST'S FRIENDS

Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call

you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but

I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My

Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen Me, but I have

chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit,

and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the

Father in My name, He may give it you. These things I command you, that

ye love one another.'--JOHN xv. 14-17.

A wonderful word has just dropped from the Master's lips, when He spoke

of laying down His life for His friends. He lingers on it as if the

idea conveyed was too great and sweet to be taken in at once, and with

soothing reiteration He assures the little group that they, even they,

are His friends.

I have ventured to take these four verses for consideration now,

although each of them, and each clause of them, might afford ample

material for a discourse, because they have one common theme. They are

a description of what Christ's friends are to Him, of what He is to

them, and of what they should be to one another. So they are a little

picture, in the sweetest form, of the reality, the blessedness, the

obligations, of friendship with Christ.

I. Notice what Christ's friends do for Him.

Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' In the former

verse, friends' means chiefly those whom He loved. Here it means mainly

those who love Him. They love Him because He loves them, of course; and

the two sides of the one thought cannot be parted. But still in this

verse the idea of friendship to Christ is looked at from the human

side, and He tells His disciples that they are His lovers as well as

beloved of Him, on condition of their doing whatsoever He commands

them.

He lingers, as I said, on the idea itself. As if He would meet the

doubts arising from the sense of unworthiness, and from some dim

perception of how He towers above them, and their limitations, He

reiterates, Wonderful as it is, you poor men, half-intelligent lovers

of Mine, you are My friends, beloved of Me, and loving Me, if ye do

whatsoever I command you.'

How wonderful that stooping love of His is, which condescends to array

itself in the garments of ours! Every form of human love Christ lays

His hand upon, and claims that He Himself exercises it in a

transcendent degree. He that doeth the will of My Father which is in

heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother.' That which is

even sacreder, the purest and most complete union that humanity is

capable of--that, too, He consecrates; for even it, sacred as it is, is

capable of a higher consecration, and, sweet as it is, receives a new

sweetness when we think of the Bride, the Lamb's wife,' and remember

the parables in which He speaks of the Marriage Supper of the Great

King, and sets forth Himself as the Husband of humanity. And passing

from that Holy of Holies out into this outer court, He lays His hand,

too, on that more common and familiar, and yet precious and sacred,

thing--the bond of friendship. The Prince makes a friend of the beggar.

Even if we do not think more loftily of Jesus Christ than do those who

regard Him simply as the perfection of humanity, is it not beautiful

and wonderful that He should look with such eyes of beaming love on

that handful of poor, ignorant fishermen, who knew Him so dimly, and

say: I pass by all the wise and the mighty, all the lofty and noble,

and My heart clings to you poor, insignificant people?' He stoops to

make them His friends, and there are none so low but that they may be

His.

This friendship lasts to-day. A peculiarity of Christianity is the

strong personal tie of real love and intimacy which will bind men, to

the end of time, to this Man that died nineteen hundred years ago. We

look back into the wastes of antiquity: mighty names rise there that we

reverence; there are great teachers from whom we have learned, and to

whom, after a fashion, we are grateful. But what a gulf there is

between us and the best and noblest of them! But here is a dead Man,

who to-day is the Object of passionate attachment and a love deeper

than life to millions of people, and will be till the end of time.

There is nothing in the whole history of the world in the least like

that strange bond which ties you and me to the Saviour, and the paradox

of the Apostle remains a unique fact in the experience of humanity:

Jesus Christ, whom, having not seen, ye love.' We stretch out our hands

across the waste, silent centuries, and there, amidst the mists of

oblivion, thickening round all other figures in the past, we touch the

warm, throbbing heart of our Friend, who lives for ever, and for ever

is near us. We here, nearly two millenniums after the words fell on the

nightly air on the road to Gethsemane, have them coming direct to our

hearts. A perpetual bond unites men with Christ to-day; and for us, as

really as in that long-past Paschal night, is it true, Ye are My

friends.'

There are no limitations in that friendship, no misconstructions in

that heart, no alienation possible, no change to be feared. There is

absolute rest for us there. Why should I be solitary if Jesus Christ is

my Friend? Why should I fear if He walks by my side? Why should

anything be burdensome if He lays it upon me and helps me to bear it?

What is there in life that cannot be faced and borne--aye, and

conquered,--if we have Him, as we all may have Him, for the Friend and

the Home of our hearts?

But notice the condition, If ye do what I command you.' Note the

singular blending of friendship and command, involving on our parts the

cultivation of the two things which are not incompatible, absolute

submission and closest friendship. He commands though He is Friend;

though He commands He is Friend. The conditions that He lays down are

the same which have already occupied our attention in former sermons of

this series, and so may be touched very lightly. Ye are My friends if

ye do the things which I command you,' may either correspond with His

former saying, If a Man love Me he will keep My commandments,' or with

His later one, which immediately precedes our text, If ye keep My

commandments ye shall abide in My love.' For this is the relationship

between love and obedience, in regard to Jesus Christ, that the love is

the parent of the obedience, and the obedience is the guard and

guarantee of the love. They who love will obey, they who obey will

strengthen love by acting according to its dictates, and will be in a

condition to feel and realise more the warmth of the rays that stream

down upon them, and to send back more fully answering obedience from

their hearts. Not in mere emotion, not in mere verbal expression, not

in mere selfish realising of the blessings of His friendship, and not

in mere mechanical, external acts of conformity, but in the flowing

down and melting of the hard and obstinate iron will, at the warmth of

His great love, is our love made perfect. The obedience, which is the

child and the preserver of love, is something far deeper than the mere

outward conformity with externally apprehended commandments. To submit

is the expression of love, and love is deepened by submission.

II. Secondly, note what Christ does for His friends.

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what

his lord doeth.' The slave may see what his lord does, but he does not

know his purpose in his acts--Theirs not to reason why.' In so far as

the relation of master and servant goes, and still more in that of

owner and slave, there is simple command on the one side and

unintelligent obedience on the other. The command needs no explanation,

and if the servant is in his master's confidence he is more than a

servant. But, says Christ, I have called you friends'; and He had

called them so before He now named them so. He had called them so in

act, and He points to all His past relationship, and especially to the

heart-outpourings of the Upper Room, as the proof that He had called

them His friends, in the fact that whatsoever He had heard of the

Father He had made known to them.

Jesus Christ, then, recognises the obligation of absolute frankness,

and He will tell His friends everything that He can. When He tells them

what He can, the voice of the Father speaks through the Son. Every one

of Christ's friends stands nearer to God than did Moses at the door of

the Tabernacle, when the wondering camp beheld him face to face with

the blaze of the Shekinah glory, and dimly heard the thunderous

utterances of God as He spake to him as a man speaks to his friend.'

That was surface-speech compared with the divine depth and fullness of

the communications which Jesus Christ deems Himself bound, and assumes

Himself able, to make to them who love Him and whom He loves.

Of course to Christ's frankness there are limits. He will not pour out

His treasures into vessels that will spill them; and as He Himself says

in the subsequent part of this great discourse, I have many things to

say unto you, but you are not able to carry them now.' His last word

was, I have declared Thy name unto My brethren, and will declare it.'

And though here He speaks as if His communication was perfect, we are

to remember that it was necessarily conditioned by the power of

reception on the part of the hearers, and that there was much yet to be

revealed of what God had whispered to Him, ere these men, that

clustered round Him, could understand the message.

That frank speech is continued to-day. Jesus Christ recognises the

obligation that binds Him to impart to each of us all that each of us

is in our inmost spirits capable of receiving. By the light which He

sheds on the Word, by many a suggestion through human lips, by many a

blessed thought rising quietly within our hearts, and bearing the token

that it comes from a sacreder source than our poor, blundering minds,

He still speaks to us, His friends.

Ought not that thought of the utter frankness of Jesus make us, for one

thing, very patient, intellectually and spiritually, of the gaps that

are left in His communications and in our knowledge? There are so many

things that we sometimes think we should like to know, things about

that dark future where some of our hearts live so constantly, things

about the depths of His nature and the divine character, things about

the relation between God's love and God's righteousness, things about

the meaning of all this dreadful mystery in which we grope our way.

These and a hundred other questionings suggest to us that it would have

been so easy for Him to have lifted a little corner of the veil, and

let a little more of the light shine out. He holds all in His hand. Why

does He thus open one finger instead of the whole palm? Because He

loves. A friend exercises the right of reticence as well as the

prerogative of speech. And for all the gaps that are left, let us bow

quietly and believe that if it had been better for us He would have

spoken. If it were not so I would have told you.' Trust Me! I tell you

all that it is good for you to receive.'

And that frankness may well teach us another lesson, viz., the

obligation of keeping our ears open and our hearts prepared to receive

the speech that does come from Him. Ah, brother! many a message from

your Lord flits past you, like the idle wind through an archway,

because you are not listening for His voice. If we kept down the noise

of that household jar within'; if we silenced passion, ambition,

selfishness, worldliness; if we withdrew ourselves, as we ought to do,

from the Babel of this world, and hid ourselves in His pavilion from

the strife of tongues'; if we took less of our religion out of books

and from other people, and were more accustomed to dwell in the secret

place of the Most High,' and to say, Speak, Friend! for Thy friend

heareth,' we should more often understand how real to-day is the voice

of Christ to them that love Him.

Such rebounds the inward ear

Catches often from afar;

Listen, prize them, hold them dear,

For of God--of God--they are.'

III. Thirdly, notice how Christ's friends come to be so, and why they

are so.

Ye have not chosen,' etc. (verse 16).

Our Lord refers here, no doubt, primarily to the little group of the

Apostles; the choice and ordaining as well as the fruit that abides,'

point, in the first place, to their apostolic office, and to the

results of their apostolic labours. But we must widen out the words a

great deal beyond that reference.

In all the cases of friendship between Christ and men, the origination

and initiation come from Him. We love Him because He first loved us.'

He has told us how, in His divine alchemy, He changes by the shedding

of His blood our enmity into friendship. In the previous verse He has

said, Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life

for his friends.' And as I remarked in my last sermon, the friends here

are the same as the enemies' for whom, the Apostle tells us that Christ

laid down His life. Since He has thus by the blood of the Cross changed

men's enmity into friendship, it is true universally that the amity

between us and Christ comes entirely from Him.

But there is more than that in the words. I do not suppose that any

man, whatever his theological notions and standpoint may be, who has

felt the love of Christ in his own heart in however feeble a measure,

but will say, as the Apostle said, I was apprehended of Christ.' It is

because He lays His seeking and drawing hand upon us that we ever come

to love Him, and it is true that His choice of us precedes our choice

of Him, and that the Shepherd always comes to seek the sheep that is

lost in the wilderness.

This, then, is how we come to be His friends; because, when we were

enemies, He loved us, and gave Himself for us, and ever since has been

sending out the ambassadors and the messengers of His love--or, rather,

the rays and beams of it, which are parts of Himself--to draw us to His

heart. And the purpose which all this forthgoing of Christ's initial

and originating friendship has had in view, is set forth in words which

I can only touch in the lightest possible manner. The intention is

twofold. First, it respects service or fruit. That ye may go'; there is

deep pathos and meaning in that word. He had been telling them that He

was going; now He says to them, You are to go. We part here. My road

lies upward; yours runs onward. Go into all the world.' He gives them a

quasi-independent position; He declares the necessity of separation; He

declares also the reality of union in the midst of the separation; He

sends them out on their course with His benediction, as He does us.

Wheresoever we go in obedience to His will, we carry the consciousness

of His friendship.

That ye may bring forth fruit'--He goes back for a moment to the sweet

emblem with which this chapter begins, and recurs to the imagery of the

vine and the fruit. Keeping His commandments' does not explain the

whole process by which we do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

We must also take this other metaphor of the bearing of fruit. Neither

an effortless, instinctive bringing forth from the renewed nature and

the Christlike disposition, nor a painful and strenuous effort at

obedience to His law, describe the whole realities of Christian

service. There must be the effort, for men do not grow Christlike in

character as the vine grows its grapes; but there must also be,

regulated and disciplined by the effort, the inward life, for no mere

outward obedience and tinkering at duties and commandments will produce

the fruit that Christ desires and rejoices to have. First comes unity

of life with Him; and then effort. Take care of modern teachings that

do not recognise these two as both essential to the complete ideal of

Christian service--the spontaneous fruit-bearing, and the strenuous

effort after obedience.

That your fruit should remain'; nothing corrupts faster than fruit.

There is only one kind of fruit that is permanent, incorruptible. The

only life's activity that outlasts life and the world is the activity

of the men who obey Christ.

The other half of the issues of this friendship is the satisfying of

our desires, That whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name He may

give it you.' We have already had substantially the same promise in

previous parts of this discourse, and therefore I may deal with it very

lightly. How comes it that it is certain that Christ's friends, living

close to Him and bearing fruit, will get what they want? Because what

they want will be in His name'--that is to say, in accordance with His

disposition and will. Make your desires Christ's, and Christ's yours,

and you will be satisfied.

IV. And now, lastly, for one moment, note the mutual friendship of

Christ's friends.

We have frequently had to consider that point--the relation of the

friends of Christ to each other. These things I command you, that ye

love one another.' This whole context is, as it were, enclosed within a

golden circlet by that commandment which appeared in a former verse, at

the beginning of it, This is My commandment, that ye love one another,'

and reappears here at the close, thus shutting off this portion from

the rest of the discourse. Friends of a friend should themselves be

friends. We care for the lifeless things that a dear friend has cared

for; books, articles of use of various sorts. If these have been of

interest to him, they are treasures and precious evermore to us. And

here are living men and women, in all diversities of character and

circumstances, but with this stamped upon them all--Christ's friends,

lovers of and loved by Him. And how can we be indifferent to those to

whom Christ is not indifferent? We are knit together by that bond. We

are but poor friends of that Master unless we feel that all which is

dear to Him is dear to us. Let us feel the electric thrill which ought

to pass through the whole linked circle, and let us beware that we slip

not our hands from the grasp of the neighbour on either side, lest,

parted from them, we should be isolated from Him, and lose some of the

love which we fail to transmit.

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SHEEP AMONG WOLVES

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If

ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are

not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the

world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant

is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will

also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours

also.'--JOHN xv. 18-20.

These words strike a discord in the midst of the sweet music to which

we have been listening. The key-note of all that has preceded has been

love--the love of Christ's friends to one another, and of all to Him,

as an answer to His love to all. That love, which is one, whether it

rise to Him or is diffused on the level of earth, is the result of that

unity of life between the Vine and the branches, of which our Lord has

been speaking such great and wonderful things. But that unity of life

between Christians and Christ has another consequence than the spread

of love. Just because it binds them to Him in a sacred community, it

separates them from those who do not share in His life, and hence the

hate' of our context is the shadow of love'; and there result two

communities--to use the much-abused words that designate them--the

Church and the World'; and the antagonism between these is deep,

fundamental, and perpetual.

Unquestionably, our Lord is here speaking with special reference to the

Apostles, who, in a very tragic sense, were sent forth as sheep in the

midst of wolves.' If we may trust tradition, every one of that little

company, Speaker as well as hearers, died a martyr's death, with the

exception of John himself, who was preserved from it by a miracle. But,

be that as it may, our Lord is here laying down a universal statement

of the permanent condition of things; and there is no more reason for

restricting the force of these words to the original hearers of them

than there is for restricting the force of any of the rest of this

wonderful discourse. The world' will be in antagonism to the Church

until the world ceases to be a world, because it obeys the King; and

then, and not till then, will it cease to be hostile to His subjects.

I. What makes this hostility inevitable?

Our Lord here prepares His hearers for what is coming by putting it in

the gentle form of an hypothesis. The frequency with which If' occurs

in this section is very remarkable. He will not startle them by the

bare, naked statement which they, in that hour of depression and

agitation, were so little able to endure, but He puts it in the shape

of a suppose that,' not because there is any doubt, but in order to

alleviate the pain of the impression which He desires to make. He says,

If the world hates,' not if the world hate'; and the tense of the

original shows that, whilst the form of the statement is hypothetical,

the substance of it is prophetic.

Jesus points to two things, as you will observe, which make this

hostility inevitable. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me

before it hated you.' And again, If ye were of the world, the world

would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have

chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' The very

language carries with it the implication of necessary and continual

antagonism. For what is the world,' in this context, but the aggregate

of men, who have no share in the love and life that flow from Jesus

Christ? Necessarily they constitute a unity, whatever diversities there

may be amongst them, and necessarily, that unity in its banded phalanx

is in antagonism, in some measure, to those who constitute the other

unity, which holds by Christ, and has been drawn by Him from out of the

world.'

If we share Christ's life, we must, necessarily, in some measure, share

His fate. It is the typical example of what the world thinks of, and

does to, goodness. And all who have the Spirit of life which was in

Jesus Christ' for the animating principle of their lives, will, just in

the measure in which they possess it, come under the same influences

which carried Him to the Cross. In a world like this, it is impossible

for a man to love righteousness and hate iniquity,' and to order his

life accordingly, without treading on somebody's corns; being a rebuke

to the opposite course of conduct, either interfering with men's

self-complacency or with their interests. From the beginning the blind

world has repaid goodness by antagonism and contempt.

And then our Lord touches another, and yet closely-connected, cause

when He speaks of His selecting the Apostles, and drawing them out of

the world, as a reason for the world's hostility. There are two groups,

and the fundamental principles that underlie each are in deadly

antagonism. In the measure in which you and I are Christians we are in

direct opposition to all the maxims which rule the world and make it a

world. What we believe to be precious it regards as of no account. What

we believe to be fundamental truth it passes by as of little

importance. Much which we feel to be wrong it regards as good. Our

jewels are its tinsel, and its jewels are our tinsel. We and it stand

in diametrical opposition of thought about God, about self, about duty,

about life, about death, about the future; and that opposition goes

right down to the bottom of things. However it may be covered over,

there is a gulf, as in some of those American canons: the towering

cliffs may be very near--only a yard or two seems to separate them; but

they go down for thousands and thousands of feet, and never are any

nearer each other, and between them at the bottom a black, sullen river

flows. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own.' If it

loves you, it is because ye are of it.

II. And so note, secondly, how this hostility is masked and modified.

There are a great many other bonds that unite men together besides the

bonds of religious life or their absence. There are the domestic ties,

there are the associations of commerce and neighbourhood, there are

surface identities of opinion about many important things. The greater

portion of our lives moves on this surface, whore all men are alike. If

you tickle us, do we not laugh; if you wound us, do we not bleed?' We

have all the same affections and needs, pursue the same avocations, do

the same sort of things, and a large portion of every one's life is

under the dominion of habit and custom, and determined by external

circumstances. So there is a film of roofing thrown over the gulf. You

can make up a crack in a wall with plaster after a fashion, and it will

hide the solution of continuity that lies beneath. But let bad weather

come, and soon the bricks gape apart as before. And so, as soon as we

get down below the surface of things and grapple with the real,

deep-lying, and formative principles of a life, we come to antagonism,

just as they used to come to it long ago, though the form of it has

become quite different.

Then there are other causes modifying this hostility. The world has got

a dash of Christianity into it since Jesus Christ spoke. We cannot say

that it is half Christianised, but some of the issues and remoter

consequences of Christianity have permeated the general conscience, and

the ethics of the Gospel are largely diffused in such a land as this.

Thus Christian men and others have, to a large extent, a common code of

morality, as long as they keep on the surface; and they not only do a

good many things exactly alike, but do a great many things from

substantially the same motives, and have the same way of looking at

much. Thus the gulf is partly bridged over; and the hostility takes

another form. We do not wrap Christians in pitch and stick them up for

candles in the Emperor's garden nowadays, but the same thing can be

done in different ways. Newspaper articles, the light laugh of scorn,

the whoop of exultation over the failures or faults of any prominent

man that has stood out boldly on Christ's side; all these indicate what

lies below the surface, and sometimes not so very far below. Many a

young man in a Manchester warehouse, trying to live a godly life, many

a workman at his bench, many a commercial traveller in the inn or on

the road, many a student on the college benches, has to find out that

there is a great gulf between him and the man who sits next to him, and

that he cannot be faithful to his Lord, and at the same time, down to

the depths of his being, a friend of one who has no friendship to his

Master.

Still another fact masks the antagonism, and that is, that after all,

the world, meaning thereby the aggregate of godless men, has a

conscience that responds to goodness, though grumblingly and

reluctantly. After all, men do know that it is better to be good, that

it is better and wiser to be like Christ, that it is nobler to live for

Him than for self, and that consciousness cannot but modify to some

extent the manifestations of the hostility, but it is there all the

same, and whosoever will be a Christian after Christ's pattern will

find out that it is there.

Let a man for Christ's sake avow unpopular beliefs, let him try

honestly to act out the New Testament, let him boldly seek to apply

Christian principles to the fashionable and popular sins of his class

or of his country, let him in any way be ahead of the conscience of the

majority, and what a chorus will be yelping at his heels! Dear

brethren, the law still remains, If any man will be a friend of the

world he is at enmity with God.'

III. Thirdly, note how you may escape the hostility.

A half-Christianised world and a more than half-secularised Church get

on well together. When they do agree, their agreement is wonderful.'

And it is a miserable thing to reflect that about the average

Christianity of this generation there is so very little that does

deserve the antagonism of the world. Why should the world care to hate

or trouble itself about a professing Church, large parts of which are

only a bit of the world under another name? There is no need whatever

that there should be any antagonism at all between a godless world and

hosts of professing Christians. If you want to escape the hostility

drop your flag, button your coat over the badge that shows that you

belong to Christ, and do the things that the people round about you do,

and you will have a perfectly easy and undisturbed life.

Of course, in the bad old slavery days, a Christianity that had not a

word to say about the sin of slave-holding ran no risk of being tarred

and feathered. Of course a Christianity in Manchester that winks hard

at commercial immoralities is very welcome on the Exchange. Of course a

Christianity that lets beer barrels alone may reckon upon having

publicans for its adherents. Of course a Christianity that blesses

flags and sings Te Deums over victories will get its share of the

spoil. Why should the world hate, or persecute, or do anything but

despise a Christianity like that, any more than a man need to care for

a tame tiger that has had its claws pared? If the world can put a hook

in the nostrils of leviathan, and make him play with its maidens, it

will substitute good-nature, half contemptuous, for the hostility which

our Master here predicts. It was out-and-out Christians that He said

the world would hate; the world likes Christians that are like itself.

Christian men and women! be you sure that you deserve the hostility

which my text predicts.

IV. And now, lastly, note how to meet this antagonism.

Reckon it as a sign and test of true union with Jesus Christ. And so,

if ever, by reason of our passing at the call of duty or benevolence

outside the circle of those who sympathise with our faith and

fundamental ideas, we encounter it more manifestly than when we dwell

among our own people,' let us count the reproach of Christ' as a

treasure to be proud of, and to be guarded.

Be sure that it is your goodness and not your evils or your weakness,

that men dislike. The world has a very keen eye for the inconsistencies

and the faults of professing Christians, and it is a good thing that it

has. The loftier your profession the sharper the judgment that is

applied to you. Many well-meaning Christian people, by an injudicious

use of Christian phraseology in the wrong place, and by the glaring

contradiction between their prayers and their talks and their daily

life, bring down a great deal of deserved hostility upon themselves and

of discredit upon Christianity; and then they comfort themselves and

say they are bearing the reproach of the Cross.' Not a bit of it! They

are bearing the natural results of their own failings and faults. And

it is for us to see to it that what provokes, if it does provoke,

hostile judgments and uncharitable criticisms, insulting speeches and

sarcasms, and the sense of our belonging to another regiment and having

other objects, is our cleaving to Jesus Christ, and not the

imperfections and the sins with which we so often spoil that cleaving.

Be you careful for this, that it is Christ in you that men turn from,

and not you yourself and your weakness and sin.

Meet this antagonism by not dropping your standard one inch. Keep the

flag right at the masthead. If you begin to haul it down, where are you

going to stop? Nowhere, until you have got it draggling in the mud at

the foot. It is of no use to try to conciliate by compromise. All that

we shall gain by that will be, as I have said, indifference and

contempt; all that we shall gain will be a loss to the cause. A great

deal is said in this day, and many efforts are being made--I cannot but

think mistaken efforts--by Christian people to bridge over this gulf in

the wrong way--that is, by trying to make out that Christianity in its

fundamental principles does approximate a great deal more closely to

the things that the world goes by than it really does. It is all vain,

and the only issue of it will be that we shall have a decaying

Christianity and a dying spiritual life. Keep the flag up; emphasise

and accentuate the things that the world disbelieves and denies, not

pushing them to the falsehood of extremes,' but not by one jot

diminishing the clearness of our testimony by reason of the world's

unwillingness to receive it. Our victory is to be won only through

absolute faithfulness to Christ's ideal.

And, lastly, meet hostility with unmoved, patient, Christlike, and

Christ-derived love and sympathy. The patient sunshine pours upon the

glaciers and melts the thick-ribbed ice at last into sweet water. The

patient sunshine beats upon the mist-cloud and breaks up its edges and

scatters it at the last. And our Lord here tells us that our

experience, if we are faithful to Him, will be like His experience, in

that some will hearken to our word though others will persecute, and to

some our testimony will come as a message from God that draws them to

the Lord Himself. These are our only weapons, brethren! The only

conqueror of the world is the love that was in Christ breathed through

us; the only victory over suspicion, contempt, alienation, is pleading,

persistent, long-suffering, self-denying love. The only way to overcome

the world's hostility is by turning the world into a church, and that

can only be done when Christ's servants oppose pity to wrath, love to

hate, and in the strength of His life who has won us all by the same

process, seek to win the world for Him by the manifestation of His

victorious love in our patient love.

Dear brethren, to which army do you belong? Which community is yours?

Are you in Christ's ranks, or are you in the world's? Do you love Him

back again, or do you meet His open heart with a closed one, and His

hand, laden with blessings, with hands clenched in refusal? To which

class do I belong?--it is the question of questions for us all; and I

pray that you and I, won from our hatred by His love, and wooed out of

our death by His life, and made partakers of His life by His death, may

yield our hearts to Him, and so pass from out of the hostility and

mistrust of a godless world into the friendships and peace of the

sheltering Vine. And then we shall esteem the reproach of Christ' if it

fall upon our heads, in however modified and mild a form, greater

riches than the treasures of Egypt,' and have respect unto the

recompense of the reward.'

May it be so with us all!

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THE WORLD'S HATRED, AS CHRIST SAW IT

But all these things will they do unto you for My name's sake, because

they know not Him that sent Me. If I had not come and spoken unto them,

they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that

hateth Me, hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the

works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they

both seen and hated both Me and My Father. But this cometh to pass,

that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They

hated Me without a cause.'--JOHN xv. 21-25.

Our Lord has been speaking of the world's hostility to His followers,

and tracing that to its hostility to Himself. In these solemn words of

our text He goes still deeper, and parallels the relation which His

disciples bear to Him and the consequent hostility that falls on them,

with the relation which He bears to the Father and the consequent

hostility that falls on Him: They hate you because they hate Me.' And

then His words become sadder and pierce deeper, and with a tone of

wounded love and disappointed effort and almost surprise at the world's

requital to Him, He goes on to say, They hate Me, because they hate the

Father.'

So, then, here we have, in very pathetic and solemn words, Christ's

view of the relation of the world to Him and to God.

I. The first point that He signalises is the world's ignorance.

These things they will do unto you,' and they will do them for My

name's sake'; they will do them because they know not Him that sent

Me.'

The world,' in Christ's language, is the aggregate of godless men. Or,

to put it a little more sharply, our Lord, in this context, gives in

His full adhesion to that narrow view which divides those who have come

under the influence of His truth into two portions. There is no mincing

of the matter in the antithesis which Christ here draws; no hesitation,

as if there were a great central mass, too bad for a blessing perhaps,

but too good for a curse; which was neither black nor white, but

neutral grey. No! however it may be with the masses beyond the reach of

the dividing and revealing power of His truth, the men that come into

contact with Him, like a heap of metal filings brought into contact

with a magnet, mass themselves into two bunches, the one those who

yield to the attraction, and the other those who do not. The one is My

disciples,' and the other is the world.' And now, says Jesus Christ,

all that mass that stands apart from Him, and, having looked upon Him

with the superficial eye of those men round about Him at that day, or

of the men who hear of Him now, have no real love to Him--have, as the

underlying motive of their conduct and their feelings, a real ignorance

of God, They know not Him that sent Me.'

Our Lord assumes that He is so completely the Copy and Revealer of the

divine nature as that any man that looks upon Him has had the

opportunity of becoming acquainted with God, and that any man who turns

away from Him has lost that opportunity. The God that the men who do

not love Jesus Christ believe in, is not the Father that sent Him. It

is a fragment, a distorted image tinted by the lens. The world has its

conception of God; but outside of Jesus Christ and His manifestation of

the whole divine nature, the world's God is but a syllable, a fragment,

a broken part of the perfect completeness. The Father of an infinite

majesty,' and of as infinite a tenderness, the stooping God, the

pitying God, the forgiving God, the loving God is known only where

Christ is accepted. In other hearts He may be dimly hoped for, in other

hearts He may be half believed in, in other hearts He may be thought

possible; but hopes and anticipations and fears and doubts are not

knowledge, and they who see not the light in Christ see but the

darkness. Out of Him God is not known, and they that turn away from His

beneficent manifestation turn their faces to the black north, from

which no sun can shine. Brother, do you know God in Christ? Unless you

do, you do not know the God who is.

But there is a deeper meaning in that word than simply the possession

of true thoughts concerning the divine nature. We know God as we know

one another; because God is a Person, as we are persons, and the only

way to know persons is through familiar acquaintance and sympathy. So

the world which turns away from Christ has no acquaintance with God.

This is a surface fact. Our Lord goes on to show what lies below it.

II. His second thought here is--the world's ignorance in the face of

Christ's light is worse than ignorance; it is sin.

Mark how He speaks: If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had

not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.' And then again:

If I had not done amongst them the works which none other men did, they

had not had sin.' So then He puts before us two forms of His

manifestation of the divine nature, by His words and His works. Of

these two He puts His words foremost, as being a deeper and more

precious and brilliant revelation of what God is than are His miracles.

The latter are subordinate, they come as a second source of

illumination. Men who will not see the beauty and listen to the truth

that lie in His word may perchance be led by His deed. But the word

towers in its nature high above the work, and the miracle to the word

is but like the picture in the child's book to the text, fit for feeble

eyes and infantile judgments, but containing far less of the revelation

of God than the sacred words which He speaks. First the words, next the

miracles.

But notice, too, how decisively, and yet simply and humbly and

sorrowfully, our Lord here makes a claim which, on the lips of any but

Himself, would have been mere madness of presumption. Think of any of

us saying that our words made all the difference between innocent

ignorance and criminality! Think of any of us saying that to listen to

us, and not be persuaded, was the sin of sins! Think of any of us

pointing to our actions and saying, In these God is so manifest that

not to see Him augurs wickedness, and is condemnation! And yet Jesus

Christ says all this. And, what is more wonderful, nobody wonders that

He says it, and the world believes that He is saying the truth when He

says it.

How does that come? There is only one answer; only one. His words were

the illuminating manifestation of God, and His deeds were the plain and

unambiguous operation of the divine hand then and there, only because

He Himself was divine, and in Him God was manifested in the flesh.'

But passing from that, notice how our Lord here declares that in

comparison with the sin of not listening to His words, and being taught

by His manifestation, all other sins dwindle into nothing. If I had not

spoken, they had not had sin.' That does not mean, of course, that

these men would have been clear of all moral delinquency; it does not

mean that there would not have been amongst them crimes against their

own consciences, crimes against the law written on their own hearts,

crimes against the law of revelation. There were liars, impure men,

selfish men, and men committing all the ordinary forms of human

transgression amongst them. And yet, says Christ, black and bespattered

as these natures are, they are white in comparison with the blackness

of the man who, looking into His face, sees nothing there that he

should desire. Beside the mountain belching out its sulphurous flame

the little pimple of a molehill is nought. And so, says Christ, heaven

heads the count of sins with this--unbelief in Me.

Ah, brother, as light grows responsibility grows, and this is the

misery of all illumination that comes through Jesus Christ, that where

it does not draw a man into His sweet love, and fill him with the

knowledge of God which is eternal life, it darkens his nature and

aggravates his condemnation, and lays a heavier burden upon his soul.

The truth that the measure of light is the measure of guilt has many

aspects. It turns a face of alleviation to the dark places of the

earth; but just in the measure that it lightens the condemnation of the

heathen, it adds weight to the condemnation of you men and women who

are bathed in the light of Christianity, and all your days have had it

streaming in upon you. The measure of the guilt is the brightness of

the light. No shadows are so black as those which the intense sunshine

of the tropics casts. And you and I live in the very tropical regions

of divine revelation, and if we turn away from Him that spoke on earth

and speaketh from heaven, of how much sorer punishment, think you,

shall we be thought worthy' than those who live away out in the

glimmering twilight of an unevangelised paganism, or who stood by the

side of Jesus Christ when they had only His earthly life to teach them?

III. The ignorance which is sin is the manifestation of hatred.

Our Lord has sorrowfully contemplated the not knowing God, which in the

blaze of His light can only come from wilful closing of the eyes, and

is therefore the very sin of sins. But that, sad as it is, is not all

which has to be said about that blindness of unbelief in Him. It

indicates a rooted alienation of heart and mind and will from God, and

is, in fact, the manifestation of an unconscious but real hatred. It is

an awful saying, and one which the lips into which grace was poured'

could not pronounce without a sigh. But it is our wisdom to listen to

what it was His mercy to say.

Observe our Lord's identification of Himself with the Father, so as

that the feelings with which men regard Him are, ipso facto, the

feelings with which they regard the Father God. He that hath seen Me

hath seen the Father.' He that hath loved Me hath loved the Father.' He

that hath hated Me hath hated the Father.' An ugly word--a word that a

great many of us think far too severe and harsh to be applied to men

who simply are indifferent to the divine love. Some say, I am conscious

of no hatred. I do not pretend to be a Christian, but I do not hate

God. Take the ordinary run of people round about us in the world; if

you say God is not in all their thoughts, I agree with you; but if you

say that they hate God, I do not believe it.'

Well, what do you think the fact that men go through their days and

weeks and months and years, and have not God in all their thoughts,

indicates as to the central feeling of their hearts towards God?

Granted that there is not actual antagonism, because there is no

thought at all, do you think it would be possible for a man who loved

God to go on for a twelvemonth and never think of, or care to please,

or desire to be near, the object that he loved? And inasmuch as, deep

down at the bottom of our moral being, there is no such thing possible

as indifference and a perfect equipoise in reference to God, it is

clear enough, I think, that--although the word must not be pressed as

if it meant conscious and active antagonism,--where there is no love

there is hate.

If a man does not love God as He is revealed to him in Jesus Christ, he

neither cares to please Him nor to think about Him, nor does he order

his life in obedience to His commands. And if it be true that obedience

is the very life-breath of love, disobedience or non-obedience is the

manifestation of antagonism, and antagonism towards God is the same

thing as hate.

Dear friends, I want some of my hearers to-day who have never honestly

asked themselves the question of what their relation to God is, to go

down into the deep places of their hearts and test themselves by this

simple inquiry: Do I do anything to please Him? Do I try to serve Him?

Is it a joy to me to be near Him? Is the thought of Him a delight, like

a fountain in the desert or the cool shadow of a great rock in the

blazing wilderness? Do I turn to Him as my Home, my Friend, my All? If

I do not, am I not deceiving myself by fancying that I stand neutral?'

There is no neutrality in a man's relation to God. It is one thing or

other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' The friendship of the world is

enmity against God.'

IV. And now, lastly, note how our Lord here touches the deep thought

that this ignorance, which is sin, and is more properly named hatred,

is utterly irrational and causeless.

All this will they do that it might be fulfilled which is written in

their law, They hated Me without a cause.' One hears sighing through

these words the Master's meek wonder that His love should be so met,

and that the requital which He receives at men's hands, for such an

unexampled and lavish outpouring of it, should be such a carelessness,

reposing upon a hidden basis of such a rooted alienation.

Without a cause'; yes! that suggests the deep thought that the most

mysterious and irrational thing in men's whole history and experience

is the way in which they recompense God in Christ for what He has done

for them. Be astonished, O ye heavens! and wonder, O ye earth!' said

one of the old prophets; the mystery of mysteries, which can give no

account of itself to satisfy reason, which has no apology, excuse, or

vindication, is just that when God loves me I do not love Him back

again; and that when Christ pours out the whole fullness of His heart

upon me, nay dull and obstinate heart gives back so little to Him who

has given me so much.

Without a cause.' Think of that Cross; think, as every poor creature on

earth has a right to think, that he and she individually were in the

mind and heart of the Saviour when He suffered and died, and then think

of what we have brought Him for it. Do we not stand ashamed at--if I

might use so trivial a word,--the absurdity as well as at the

criminality of our requital? Causeless love on the one side, occasioned

by nothing but itself, and causeless indifference on the other,

occasioned by nothing but itself, are the two powers that meet in this

mystery-men's rejection of the infinite love of God.

My friend, come away from the unreasonable people, come away from the

men who can give no account of their attitude. Come away from those who

pay benefits by carelessness, and a Love that died by an indifference

that will not cast an eye upon that miracle of mercy, and let His love

kindle the answering flame in your hearts. Then you will know God as

only they who love Christ know Him, and in the sweetness of a mutual

bond will lose the misery of self, and escape the deepening

condemnation of those who see Christ on the Cross and do not care for

the sight, nor learn by it to know the infinite tenderness and holiness

of the Father that sent Him.

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OUR ALLY

But when the Comforter Is come, whom I will send unto you from the

Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He

shall testify of Me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have

been with Me from the beginning.'--JOHN xv. 26, 27.

Our Lord has been speaking of a world hostile to His followers and to

Him. He proceeds, in the words which immediately follow our text, to

paint that hostility as aggravated even to the pitch of religious

murder. But here He lets a beam of light in upon the darkness. These

forlorn Twelve, listening to Him, might well have said, Thou art about

to leave us; how can we alone face this world in arms, with which Thou

dost terrify us?' And here He lets them see that they will not be left

alone, but have a great Champion, clad in celestial armour, who, coming

straight from God, will be with them and put into their hands a weapon,

with which they may conquer the world, and turn it into a friend, and

with which alone they must meet the world's hate.

So, then, we have three things in this text; the great promise of an

Ally in the conflict with the world; the witness which that Ally bears,

to fortify against the world; and the consequent witness with which

Christians may win the world.

I. Now consider briefly the first of these points, the great promise of

an Ally in the conflict with the world.

I may touch, very lightly, upon the wonderful designation of this

Champion-Friend whom Christ sends, because on former occasions in this

course of sermons we have had to deal with the same thoughts, and there

will be subsequent opportunities of recurring to them. But I may just

emphasise in a few sentences the points which our Lord here signalises

in regard to the Champion whom He sends. There is a double designation

of that Spirit, the Comforter' and the Spirit of truth.' There is a

double description of His mission, as being sent' by Jesus, and as

proceeding from the Father,' and there is a single statement as to the

position from which He comes to us. A word about each of these things.

I have already explained in former sermons that the notion of

Comforter,' as it is understood in modern English, is a great deal too

restricted and narrow to cover the whole ground of this great and

blessed promise. The Comforter whom Christ sends is no mere drier of

men's tears and gentle Consoler of human sorrows, but He is a mightier

Spirit than that, and the word by which He is described in our text,

which means one who is summoned to the side of another,' conveys the

idea of a helper who is brought to the man to be helped, in order to

render whatever aid and succour that man's weakness and circumstances

may require. The verses before our text suggest what sort of aid and

succour the disciples will need. They are to be as sheep in the midst

of wolves. Their defenceless purity will need a Protector, a strong

Shepherd. They stand alone amongst enemies. There must be some one

beside them to fight for them, to shield and to encourage them, to be

their Safety and their Peace. And that Paraclete, who is called to our

side, comes for the special help which these special circumstances

require, and is a strong Spirit who will be our Champion and our Ally,

whatever antagonism may storm against us, and however strong and

well-armed may be the assaulting legions of the world's hate.

Then, still further, the other designation here of this strong

Succourer and Friend is the Spirit of truth,' by which is designated,

not so much His characteristic attribute, as rather the weapon which He

wields, or the material with which He works. The truth' is His

instrument; that is to say, the Spirit of God sent by Jesus Christ is

the Strengthener, the Encourager, the Comforter, the Fighter for us and

with us, because He wields that great body of truth, the perfect

revelation of God, and man, and duty, and salvation, which is embodied

in the incarnation and work of Jesus Christ our Lord. The truth is His

weapon, and it is by it that He makes us strong.

Then, still further, there is a twofold description here of the mission

of this divine Champion, as sent' by Christ, and proceeding from the

Father.'

In regard to the former, I need only remind you that, in a previous

part of this wonderful discourse, our Lord speaks of that divine Spirit

as being sent by the Father in His name and in answer to His prayer.

The representation here is by no means antagonistic to, or diverse

from, that other representation, but rather the fact that the Father

and the Son, according to the deep teaching of Scripture, are in so far

one as that whatsoever the Son seeth the Father do that also the Son

doeth likewise,' makes it possible to attribute to Him the work which,

in another place, is ascribed to the Father. In speaking of the Persons

of the Deity, let us never forget that that word is only partially

applicable to that ineffable Being, and that whilst with us it implies

absolute separation of individuals, it does not mean such separation in

the case of its imperfect transference to the mysteries of the divine

nature; but rather, the Son doeth what the Father doeth, and therefore

the Spirit is sent forth by the Father, and also the Son sends the

Spirit.

But, on the other hand, we are not to regard that divine Spirit as

merely a Messenger sent by another. He proceeds from the Father.' That

word has been the battlefield of theological controversy, with which I

do not purpose to trouble you now. For I do not suppose that in its use

here it refers at all to the subject to which it has been sometimes

applied, nor contains any kind of revelation of the eternal depths of

the divine Nature and its relations to itself. What is meant here is

the historical coming forth into human life of that divine Spirit. And,

possibly, the word proceeds' is chosen in order to contrast with the

word sent,' and to give the idea of a voluntary and personal action of

the Messenger, who not only is sent by the Father, but of Himself

proceeds on the mighty work to which He is destined.

Be that as it may, mark only, for the last thought here about the

details of this great promise, that wonderful phrase, twice repeated in

our Lord's words, and emphasised by its verbal repetition in the two

clauses, which in all other respects are so different--from the

Father.' The word translated from' is not the ordinary word so

rendered, but rather designates a position at the side of than an

origin from, and suggests much rather the intimate and ineffable union

between Father, Son, and Spirit, than the source from which the Spirit

comes. I touch upon these things very lightly, and gather them up into

one sentence. Here, then, are the points. A Person who is spoken of as

He'--a divine Person whose home from of old has been close by the

Father's side--a Person whose instrument is the revealed truth

ensphered and in germ in the facts of Christ's incarnation and life--a

divine Person, wielding the truth, who is sent by Christ as His

Representative, and in some sense a continuance of His personal

Presence--a divine, personal Spirit coming from the Father, wielding

the truth, sent by Christ, and at the side of all the persecuted and

the weak, all world-hated and Christian men, as their Champion, their

Combatant, their Ally, their Inspiration, and their Power. Is not that

enough to make the weakest strong? Is not that enough to make us more

than conquerors through Him that loved us'? All nations have legends of

the gods fighting at the head of their armies, and through the dust of

battle the white horses and the shining armour of the celestial

champions have been seen. The childish dream is a historical reality.

It is not we that fight, it is the Spirit of God that fighteth in us.

II. And so note, secondly, the witness of the Spirit which fortifies

against the world.

He shall bear witness of Me.' Now we must especially observe here that

little phrase, unto you.' For that tells us at once that the witness

which our Lord has in mind here is something which is done within the

circle of the Christian believers, and not in the wide field of the

world's history or in nature. Of course it is a great truth that long

before Jesus Christ, and to-day far beyond the limits of His name and

knowledge, to say nothing of His faith and obedience, the Spirit of God

is working. As of old He brooded over the chaotic darkness, ever

labouring to turn chaos into order, and darkness into light, and

deformity into beauty; so today, all over the field of humanity, He is

operating. Grand as that truth is, it is not the truth here. What is

spoken of here is something that is done in and on Christian men, and

not even through them on the world, but in them for themselves. He

shall testify of Me' to you.

Now it is to be noted, also, that the first and special application of

these words is to the little group listening to Him. Never were men

more desolate and beaten down than these were, in the prospect of

Christ's departure. Never were men more utterly bewildered and

dispirited than these were, in the days between His crucifixion and His

resurrection. Think of them during His earthly life, their narrow

understandings, their manifold faults, moral as well as intellectual.

How little perception they had of anything that He said to them, as

their own foolish questions abundantly show! How little they had drunk

in His spirit, as their selfish and ambitious janglings amongst

themselves abundantly show! They were but Jews like their brethren,

believing, indeed, that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, but not knowing

what it was that they believed, or of what kind the Messiah was in whom

they were thus partially trusting. But they loved Him and were led by

Him, and so they were brought into a larger place by the Spirit whom

Christ sent.

What was it that made these dwarfs into giants in six weeks? What was

it that turned their narrowness into breadth; that made them start up

all at once as heroes, and that so swiftly matured them, as the fruits

and flowers are ripened under tropical sunshine? The resurrection and

ascension of Jesus Christ had a great deal to do with the change; but

they were not its whole cause. There is no explanation of the

extraordinary transformation of these men as we see them in the pages

of the Gospels, and as we find them on the pages of the Acts of the

Apostles, except this--the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus

Christ as facts, and the Spirit on Pentecost as an indwelling

Interpreter of the facts. He came, and the weak became strong, and the

foolish wise, and the blind enlightened, and they began to

understand--though it needed all their lives to perfect the

teaching,--what it was that their ignorant hands had grasped and their

dim perceptions had seen, when they touched the hands and looked upon

the face of Jesus Christ. The witness of the Spirit of God working

within them, working upon what they knew of the historical facts of

Christ's life, and interpreting these to them, was the explanation of

their change and growth. And the New Testament is the product of that

change. Christ's life was the truth which the Spirit used, and a

product of His teaching was these Epistles which we have, and which for

us step into the place which the historical facts held for them, and

become the instrument with which the Spirit of God will deepen our

understanding of Christ and enlarge our knowledge of what He is to us.

So, dear friends, whilst here we have a promise which specially

applies, no doubt, to these twelve Apostles, and the result of which in

them was different from its result in us, inasmuch as the Spirit's

teaching, recorded in the New Testament, becomes for us the

authoritative rule of faith and practice, the promise still applies to

each of us in a secondary and modified sense. For there is nothing in

these great valedictory words of our Lord's which has not a universal

bearing, and is not the revelation of a permanent truth in regard to

the Christian Church. And, therefore, here we have the promise of a

universal gift to all Christian men and women, of an actual divine

Spirit to dwell with each of us, to speak in our hearts.

And what will He speak there? He will teach us a deeper knowledge of

Jesus Christ. He will help us to understand better what He is. He will

show us more and more of the whole sweep of His work, of the whole

infinite truth for morals and religion, for politics and society, for

time and for eternity, about men and about God, which is wrapped up in

that great saying which we first of all, perhaps under the pressure of

our own sense of sin, grasp as our deliverance from sin: God so loved

the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth

in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' That is the sum

of truth which the Spirit of God interprets to every faithful heart.

And as the days roll on, and new problems rise, and new difficulties

present themselves, and new circumstances emerge in our personal life,

we find the truth, which we at first dimly grasped as life and

salvation, opening out into wisdom and depth and meaning that we never

dreamed of in the early hours. A Spirit that bears witness of Christ

and will make us understand Him better every day we live, if we choose,

is the promise that is given here, for all Christian men and women.

Then note that this inward witness of Christ's depth and preciousness

is our true weapon and stay against a hostile world. A little candle in

a room will make the lightning outside almost invisible; and if I have

burning in my heart the inward experience and conviction of what Jesus

Christ is and what He has done and will do for me--Oh! then, all the

storm without may rage, and it will not trouble me.

If you take an empty vessel and bring pressure to bear upon it, in go

the sides. Fill it, and they will resist the pressure. So with growing

knowledge of Christ, and growing personal experience of His sweetness

in our souls, we shall be able, untouched and undinted, to throw off

the pressure which would otherwise have crushed us.

Therefore, dear friends, here is the true secret of tranquillity, in an

age of questioning and doubt. Let me have that divine Voice speaking in

my heart, as I may have, and no matter what questions may be doubtful,

this is sure--We know in whom we have believed'; and we can say, Settle

all your controversies any way you like: one thing I know, and that

divine Voice is ever saying it to me in my deepest consciousness--the

Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know

Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true.' Labour for more of

this inward, personal conviction of the preciousness of Jesus Christ to

strengthen you against a hostile world.

And remember that there are conditions under which this Voice speaks in

our souls. One is that we attend to the instrument which the Spirit of

God uses, and that is the truth.' If Christians will not read their

Bibles, they need not expect to have the words of these Bibles

interpreted and made real to them by any inward experience. If you want

to have a faith which is vindicated and warranted by your daily

experience, there is only one way to get it, and that is, to use the

truth which the Spirit uses, and to bring yourself into contact,

continual and reverent and intelligent, with the great body of divine

truth that is conveyed in these authoritative words of the Spirit of

God speaking through the first witnesses.

And there must be moral discipline too. Laziness, worldliness, the

absorption of attention with other things, self-conceit, prejudice,

and, I was going to say, almost above all, the taking of our religion

and religious opinions at secondhand from men and teachers and

books--all these stand in the way of our hearing the Spirit of God when

He speaks. Come away from the babble and go by yourself, and take your

Bibles with you, and read them, and meditate upon them, and get near

the Master of whom they speak, and the Spirit which uses the truth will

use it to fortify you.

III. And, lastly, note the consequent witness with which the Christian

may win the world.

And ye also shall bear witness of Me, because ye have been with Me from

the beginning.' That also' has, of course, direct reference to the

Apostles' witness to the facts of our Lord's historical appearance, His

life, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension; and therefore

their qualification was simply the companionship with Him which enabled

them to say, We saw what we tell you; we were witnesses from the

beginning.'

But then, again, I say that there is no word here that belongs only to

the Apostles; it belongs to us all, and so here is the task of the

Christian Church in all its members. They receive the witness of the

Spirit, and they are Christ's witnesses in the world.

Note what we have to do--to bear witness; not to argue, not to adorn,

but simply to attest. Note what we have to attest--the fact, not of the

historical life of Jesus Christ, because we are not in a position to be

witnesses of that, but the fact of His preciousness and power, and the

fact of our own experience of what He has done for us. Note, that that

is by far the most powerful agency for winning the world. You can never

make men angry by saying to them, We have found the Messias.' You

cannot irritate people, or provoke them into a controversial opposition

when you say, Brother, let me tell you my experience. I was dark, sad,

sinful, weak, solitary, miserable; and I got light, gladness, pardon,

strength, companionship, and a joyful hope. I was blind--you remember

me when my eyes were dark, and I sat begging outside the Temple; I was

blind, now I see--look at my eyeballs.' We can all say that. This is

the witness that needs no eloquence, no genius, no anything except

honesty and experience; and whosoever has tasted and felt and handled

of the Word of Life may surely go to a brother and say, Brother, I have

eaten and am satisfied. Will you not help yourselves?' We can all do

it, and we ought to do it. The Christian privilege of being witnessed

to by the Spirit of God in our hearts brings with it the Christian duty

of being witnesses in our turn to the world. That is our only weapon

against the hostility which godless humanity bears to ourselves and to

our Master. We may win men by that; we can win them by nothing else. Ye

are My witnesses, saith the Lord, and My servants whom I have chosen.'

Christian friend, listen to the Master, who says, Him that confesseth

Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father in heaven.'

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WHY CHRIST SPEAKS

These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that

whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these

things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father,

nor Me. But these things have I told you, that, when the time shall

come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said

not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go My

way to Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou?

But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your

heart.'--JOHN xvi. 1-6.

The unbroken flow of thought, and the many subtle links of connection

between the parts, of these inexhaustible last words of our Lord make

any attempt at grouping them into sections more or less unsatisfactory

and artificial. But I have ventured to throw these, perhaps too many,

verses together for our consideration now, because a phrase of frequent

recurrence in them manifestly affords a key to their main subject.

Notice how our Lord four times repeats the expression, These things

have I spoken unto you.' He is not so much adding anything new to His

words, as rather contemplating the reasons for His speech now, the

reasons for His silence before, and the imperfect apprehension of the

things spoken which His disciples had, and which led to their making

His announcement, thus imperfectly understood, an occasion for sorrow

rather than for joy. There is a kind of landing place or pause here in

the ascending staircase. Our Lord meditates for Himself, and invites us

to meditate with Him, rather upon His past utterances than upon

anything additional to them. So, then, whilst it is true that we have

in two of these verses a repetition, in a somewhat more intense and

detailed form, of the previous warnings of the hostility of the world,

in the main the subject of the present section is that which I have

indicated. And I take the fourfold recurrence of that clause to which I

have pointed as marking out for us the leading ideas that we are to

gather from these words.

I. There is, first, our Lord's loving reason for His speech.

This is given in a double form. These things have I spoken unto you,

that ye should not be offended.' And, again, These things have I told

you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of

them.' These two statements substantially coalesce and point to the

same idea.

They are separated, as I have said, by a reiteration, in more emphatic

form, of the dark prospect which He has been holding out to His

disciples. He tells them that the world which hates them is to be fully

identified with the apostate Jewish Church. The synagogue' is for them

the world.' There is a solemn lesson in that. The organised body that

calls itself God's Church and House may become the most rampant enemy

of Christ's people, and be the truest embodiment on the face of the

earth of all that He means by the world.' A formal church is the true

world always; and to-day as then. And such a body will do the cruellest

things and believe that it is offering up Christ's witnesses as

sacrifices to God. That is partly an aggravation and partly an

alleviation of the sin. It is possible that the inquisitor and the man

in the San Benito, whom he ties to the stake, may shake hands yet at

His side up yonder. But a church which has become, the world will do

its persecution and think that it is worship, and call the burning of

God's people an auto-da-fe (act of faith); and the bottom of it all is

that, in the blaze of light, and calling themselves God's, they do not

know' either God or Christ. They do not know the one because they will

not know the other.

But that is all parenthetical in the present section, and so I say

nothing more about it; and ask you, rather, just to look at the loving

reasons which Christ here suggests for His present speech--that ye

should not be offended,' or stumble. He warns them of the storm before

it bursts, lest, when it bursts, it should sweep them away from their

moorings. Of course, there could be nothing more productive of

intellectual bewilderment, and more likely to lead to doubt as to one's

own convictions, than to find oneself at odds with the synagogue about

the question of the Messiah. A modest man might naturally say, Perhaps

I am wrong and they are right.' A coward would be sure to say, I will

sink my convictions and fall in with the majority.' The stumbling-block

for these first Jewish converts, in the attitude of the whole mass of

the nation towards Christ and His pretensions, is one of such a

magnitude as we cannot, by any exercise of our imagination, realise.

And,' says Christ, the only way by which you will ever get over the

temptation to intellectual doubt or to cowardly apostasy that arises

from your being thrown out of sympathy with the whole mass of your

people, and the traditions of the generations, is to reflect that I

told you it would be so, before it came to pass.'

Of course all that has a special bearing upon those to whom it was

originally addressed, and then it has a secondary bearing upon

Christians, whose lot it is to live in a time of actual persecution.

But that does not in the slightest degree destroy the fact that it also

has a bearing upon every one of us. For if you and I are Christian

people, and trying to live like our Master, and to do as He would have

us to do, we too shall often have to stand in such a very small

minority, and be surrounded by people who take such an entirely

opposite view of duty and of truth, as that we shall be only too much

disposed to give up and falter in the clearness, fullness, and

braveness of our utterance, and think, Well, perhaps after all it is

better for me to hold my tongue.'

And then, besides this, there are all the cares and griefs which befall

each of us, with regard to which also, as well as with regard to the

difficulties and dangers and oppositions which we may meet with in a

faithful Christian life, the principles of my text have a distinct and

direct application. He has told us in order that we might not stumble,

because when the hour comes and the sorrow comes with it, we remember

that He told us all about it before.

It is one of the characteristics of Christianity that Jesus Christ does

not try to enlist recruits by highly-coloured, rosy pictures of the

blessing and joy of serving Him, keeping His hand all the while upon

the weary marches and the wounds and pains. He tells us plainly at the

beginning, If you take My yoke upon you, you will have to carry a heavy

burden. You will have to abstain from a great many things that you

would like to do. You will have to do a great many things that your

flesh will not like. The road is rough, and a high wall on each side.

There are lovely flowers and green pastures on the other side of the

hedge, where it is a great deal easier walking upon the short grass

than it is upon the stony path. The roadway is narrow, and the gateway

is very strait, but the track goes steadily up. Will you accept the

terms and come in and walk upon it?'

It is far better and nobler, and more attractive also, to tell us

frankly and fully the difficulties and dangers than to try and coax us

by dwelling on pleasures and ease. Jesus Christ will have no service on

false pretences, but will let us understand at the beginning that if we

serve under His flag we have to make up our minds to hardships which

otherwise we may escape, to antagonisms which otherwise will not be

provoked, and to more than an ordinary share of sorrow and suffering

and pain. Through much tribulation we must enter the Kingdom.'

And the way by which all these troubles and cares, whether they be

those incident and peculiar to Christian life, or those common to

humanity, can best be met and overcome, is precisely by this thought,

The Master has told us before.' Sorrows anticipated are more easily

met. It is when the vessel is caught with all its sails set that it is

almost sure to go down, and, at all events, sure to be badly damaged in

the typhoon. But when the barometer has been watched, and its fall has

given warning, and everything movable has been made fast, and every

spare yard has been sent below, and all tightened up and

ship-shape--then she can ride out the storm. Forewarned is forearmed.

Savages think, when an eclipse comes, that a wolf has swallowed the

sun, and it will never come out again. We know that it has all been

calculated beforehand, and since we know that it is coming to-morrow,

when it does come, it is only a passing darkness. Sorrow anticipated is

sorrow half overcome; and when it falls on us, the bewilderment, as if

some strange thing had happened,' will be escaped when we can remember

that the Master has told us it all beforehand.

And again, sorrow foretold gives us confidence in our Guide. We have

the chart, and as we look upon it we see marked waterless country,'

pathless rocks,' desert and sand,' wells and palm-trees.' Well, when we

come to the first of these, and find ourselves, as the map says, in the

waterless country; and when, as we go on step by step, and mile after

mile, we find it is all down there, we say to ourselves, The remainder

will be accurate, too,' and if we are in Marah' to-day, where the water

is bitter,' and nothing but the wood of the tree that grows there can

ever sweeten it, we shall be at Elim' to-morrow, where there are the

twelve wells and the seventy palm trees.' The chart is right, and the

chart says that the end of it all is the land that flows with milk and

honey.' He has told us this; if there had been anything worse than

this, He would have told us that. If it were not so I would have told

you.' The sorrow foretold deepens our confidence in our Guide.

Sorrow that comes punctually in accordance with His word plainly comes

in obedience to His will. Our Lord uses a little word in this context

which is very significant. He says, When their hour is come.'

Their hour'--the time allotted to them. Allotted by whom? Allotted by

Him. He could tell that they would come, because it was as His

instruments that they came. Their time' was His appointment. It was

only an hour,' a definite, appointed, and brief period in accordance

with His loving purpose. It takes all sorts of weathers to make a year;

and after all the sorts of weathers are run out, the year's results are

realised and the calm comes. And so the good old hymn, with its rhythm

that speaks at once of fear and triumph, has caught the true meaning of

these words of our Lord's--

Why should I complain

Of want or distress,

Temptation or pain?

He told me no less.'

These things have I spoken unto you that ye might not be offended.'

II. Still further, note our Lord's loving reasons for past silence.

These things I said not unto you from the beginning, because I was with

you.'

Of course there had been in His early ministry hints, and very plain

references, to persecutions and trials, but we must not restrict the

these things' of my text to that only, but rather include the whole of

the previous chapter, in which He sets the sorrow and the hostility

which His servants have to endure in their true light, as being the

consequences of their union with Him and of the closeness and the

identity of life and fate between the Vine and the branches. In so

systematic and detailed fashion, and with such an exhibition of the

grounds of its necessity, our Lord had not spoken of the world's

hostility in His earlier ministry, but had reserved it to these last

moments, and the reason why He had given but passing hints before was

because He was there. What a superb confidence that expresses in His

ability to shield His poor followers from all that might hurt and harm

them! He spreads the ample robe of His protection over them, or rather,

to go back to His own metaphor, as a hen gathereth her chickens under

her wings' so He gathers them to His own breast, and stretches over

them that which is at once protection and warmth, and keeps them safe.

As long as He is there, no harm can come to them. But He is going away,

and so it is time to speak, and to speak more plainly.

That, too, yields for us, dear brethren, truths that apply to us quite

as much as to that little group of silent listeners. For us, too,

difficulties and sorrows, though foretold in general terms, are largely

hidden till they are near. It would have been of little use for Christ

to have spoken more plainly in those early days of His ministry. The

disciples managed to forget and to misunderstand His plain utterances,

for instance, about His own death and resurrection. There needs to be

an adaptation between the hearing ear and the spoken word, in order

that the word spoken should be of use, and there are great tracts of

Scripture dealing with the sorrows of life, which lie perfectly dark

and dead to us, until experience vitalises them. The old Greeks used to

send messages from one army to another by means of a roll of parchment

twisted spirally round a baton, and then written on. It was perfectly

unintelligible when it fell into a man's hands that had not a

corresponding baton to twist it upon. Many of Christ's messages to us

are like that. You can only understand the utterances when life gives

you the frame round which to wrap them, and then they flash up into

meaning, and we say at once, He told us it all before, and I scarcely

knew that He had told me, until this moment when I need it.'

Oh, it is merciful that there should be a gradual unveiling of what is

to come to us, that the road should wind, and that we should see so

short a way before us. Did you never say to yourselves, If I had known

all this before, I do not think I could have lived to face it'? And did

you not feel how good and kind and loving it was, that in the

revelation there had been concealment, and that while Jesus Christ had

told us in general terms that we must expect sorrows and trials, this

specific form of sorrow and trial had not been foreseen by us until we

came close to it? Thank God for the loving reticence, and for the as

loving eloquence of His speech and of His silence, with regard to

sorrow.

And take this further lesson, that there ought to be in all our lives

times of close and blessed communion with that Master, when the sense

of His presence with us makes all thought of sorrows and trials in the

future out of place and needlessly disturbing. If these disciples had

drunk in the spirit of Jesus Christ when they were with Him, then they

would not have been so bewildered when He left them. When He was near

them there was something better for them to do than to be over

exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evils' in the

future--namely, to grow into His life, to drink in the sweetness of His

presence, to be moulded into the likeness of His character, to

understand Him better, and to realise His nearness more fully. And,

dear brethren, for us all there are times--and it is our own fault if

these are not very frequent and blessed--when thus, in such an hour of

sweet communion with the present Christ, the future will be all radiant

and calm, if we look into it, or, better, the present will be so

blessed that there will be no need to think of the future. These men in

the upper chamber, if they had learnt all the lessons that He was

teaching them then, would not have gone out, to sleep in Gethsemane,

and to tell lies in the high priest's hall, and to fly like frightened

sheep from the Cross, and to despair at the tomb. And you and I, if we

sit at His table, and keep our hearts near Him, eating and drinking of

that heavenly manna, shall go in the strength of that meat forty days

into the wilderness,' and say--

E'en let the unknown to-morrow

Bring with it what it may.'

III. Lastly, I must touch, for the sake of completeness, upon the final

thought in these pregnant verses, and that is, the imperfect

apprehension of our Lord's words, which leads to sorrow instead of joy.

Now I go My way to Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither

goest Thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath

filled your heart.' He had been telling them--and it was the one

definite idea that they gathered from His words--that He was going. And

what did they say? They said, Going! What is to become of us?' If there

had been a little less selfishness and a little more love, and if they

had put their question, Going! What is to become of Him?' then it would

not have been sorrow that would have filled their hearts, but a joy

that would have flooded out all the sorrow, and the winter of their

discontent' would have been changed into glorious summer,' because He

was going to Him that sent Him; that is to say, He was going with His

work done and His message accomplished. And therefore, if they could

only have overlooked their own selves, and the bearing of His

departure, as it seemed to them, on themselves, and have thought of it

a little as it affected Him, they would have found that all the

oppressive and the dark in it would have disappeared, and they would

have been glad.

Ah, dear brethren, that gives us a thought on which I can but touch

now, that the steadfast contemplation of the ascended Christ, who has

gone to the Father, having finished His work, is the sovereign antidote

against all sense of separation and solitude, the sovereign power by

which we may face a hostile world, the sovereign cure for every sorrow.

If we could live in the light of the great triumphant, ascended Lord,

then, Oh, how small would the babble of the world be. If the great

White Throne, and He that sits upon it, were more distinctly before us,

then we could face anything, and sorrow would become a solemn scorn of

ills,' and all the transitory would be reduced to its proper

insignificance, and we should be emancipated from fear and every

temptation to unfaithfulness and apostasy. Look up to the Master who

has gone, and as the dying martyr outside the city wall saw the heavens

opened, and the Son of Man standing'--having sprung to His feet to help

His poor servant--at the right hand of God,' so with that vision in our

eyes and the light of that Face flashing upon our faces, and making

them like the angels', we shall be masters of grief and care, and pain

and trial, and enmity and disappointment, and sorrow and sin, and feel

that the absent Christ is the present Christ, and that the present

Christ is the conquering power in us.

Dear brethren, there is nothing else that will make us victors over the

world and ourselves. If we can grasp Him by our faith and keep

ourselves near Him, then union with Him as of the Vine and the

branches, which will result inevitably in suffering here, will result

as inevitably in joy hereafter. For He will never relax the adamantine

grasp of His strong hand until He raises us to Himself, and if so be

that we suffer with Him we shall also be glorified together.'

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THE DEPARTING CHRIST AND THE COMING SPIRIT

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go

away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but

if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will

convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of

judgment.'--JOHN xvi. 7, 8.

We read these words in the light of all that has gone after, and to us

they are familiar and almost thread-bare. But if we would appreciate

their sublimity, we must think away nineteen centuries, and all

Christendom, and recall these eleven poor men and their peasant Leader

in the upper room. They were not very wise, nor very strong, and

outside these four walls there was scarcely a creature in the whole

world that had the least belief either in Him or in them. They had

everything against them, and most of all their own hearts. They had

nothing for them but their Master's promise. Their eyes had been dimmed

by their sorrowful hearts, so that they could not see the truth which

He had been trying to reveal to them; and His departure had presented

itself to them only as it affected themselves, and therefore had

brought a sense of loss and desolation.

And now He bids them think of that departure, as it affects themselves,

as pure gain. It is for your profit that I go away.' He explains that

staggering statement by the thought which He has already presented to

them, in varying aspects, of His departure as the occasion for the

coming of that Great Comforter, who, when He is come, will through them

work upon the world, which knows neither them nor Him. They are to go

forth as sheep in the midst of wolves,' but in this promise He tells

them that they will become the judges and accusers of the world, which,

by the Spirit dwelling in them, they will be able to overcome, and

convict of error and of fault.

We must remember that the whole purpose of the words which we are

considering now is the strengthening of the disciples in their conflict

with the world, and that, therefore, the operations of that divine

Spirit which are here spoken of are operations carried on by their

instrumentality and through the word which they spake. With that

explanation we can consider the great words before us.

I. The first thing that strikes me about them is that wonderful thought

of the gain to Christ's servants from Christ's departure. It is

expedient for you that I go away.'

I need not enlarge here upon what we have had frequent occasion to

remark, the manner in which our Lord here represents the complex whole

of His death and ascension as being His own voluntary act. He goes.' He

is neither taken away by death nor rapt up to heaven in a whirlwind,

but of His own exuberant power and by His own will He goes into the

region of the grave and thence to the throne. Contrast the story of His

ascension with that Old Testament story of the ascension of Elijah. One

needed the chariot of fire and the horses of fire to bear him up into

the sphere, all foreign to his mortal and earthly manhood; the Other

needed no outward power to lift Him, nor any vehicle to carry Him from

this dim spot which men call earth, but slowly, serenely, upborne by

His own indwelling energy, and rising as to His native home, He

ascended up on high, and went where the very manner of His going

proclaimed that He had been before. If I go away, I will send Him.'

But that is a digression. What we are concerned with now is the thought

of Christ's departure as being a step in advance, and a positive gain,

even to those poor, bewildered men who were clustering round Him,

depending absolutely upon Himself, and feeling themselves orphaned and

helpless without Him.

Now if we would feel the full force and singularity of this saying of

our Lord's, let us put side by side with it that other one, I have a

desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.

Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.' Why is it

that the Apostle says, Though I want to go I am bound to stay?' and why

is it that the Master says, It is for your good that I am going,' but

because of the essential difference in the relation of the two to the

people who are to be left, and in the continuance of the work of the

two after they had departed? Paul knew that when he went, whatever

befell those whom he loved and would fain help, he could not stretch a

hand to do anything for them. He knew that death dropped the portcullis

between him and them, and, whatever their sore need on the one side of

the iron gate, he on the other could not succour or save. Jesus Christ

said, It is better for you that I should go,' because He knew that all

His influences would flow through the grated door unchecked, and that,

departed, He would still be the life of them that trusted in Him; and,

having left them, would come near them, by the very act of leaving

them.

And so there is here indicated for us--as we shall have occasion to see

more fully, presently,--in that one singular and anomalous fact of

Christ's departure being a positive gain to those that trust in Him,

the singularity and uniqueness of His work for them and His relation to

them.

The words mean a great deal more than the analogies of our relation to

dear ones or great ones, loves or teachers, who have departed, might

suggest. Of course we all know that it is quite true that death reveals

to the heart the sweetness and the preciousness of the departed ones,

and that its refining touch manifests to our blind eyes what we did not

see so clearly when they were beside us. We all know that it needs

distance to measure men, and the dropping away of the commonplace and

the familiar ere we can see the likeness' of our contemporaries to the

great of old.' We have to travel across the plains before we can

measure the relative height of the clustered mountains, and discern

which is manifestly the loftiest. And all this is true in reference to

Jesus Christ and His relation to us. But that does not go half-way

towards the understanding of such words as these of my text, which tell

us that so singular and solitary is His relation to us that the thing

which ends the work of all other men, and begins the decay of their

influence, begins for Him a higher form of work and a wider sweep of

sway. He is nearer us when He leaves us, and works with us and in us

more mightily from the throne than He did upon the earth. Who is He of

whom this is true? And what kind of work is it of which it is true that

death continues and perfects it?

So let me note, before I pass on, that there is a great truth here for

us. We are accustomed to look back to our Lord's earthly ministry, and

to fancy that those who gathered round Him, and heard Him speak, and

saw His deeds, were in a better position for loving Him and trusting

Him than you and I are. It is all a mistake. We have lost nothing that

they had which was worth the keeping; and we have gained a great deal

which they had not. We have not to compare our relation to Christ with

theirs, as we might do our relation to some great thinker or poet, with

that of his contemporaries, but we have Christ in a better form, if I

may so speak; and we, on whom the ends of the world are come, may have

a deeper and a fuller and a closer intimacy with Him than was possible

for men whose perceptions were disturbed by sense, and who had to

pierce through the veil, that is to say, His flesh,' before they

reached the Holy of Holies of His spirit.

II. Note, secondly, the coming for which Christ's going was needful,

and which makes that going a gain.

If I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart

I will send Him unto you.' Now we have already, in former sermons,

touched upon many of the themes which would naturally be suggested by

these words, and therefore I do not propose to dwell upon them at any

length. There is only one point to which I desire to refer briefly

here, and that is the necessity which here seems to be laid down by our

Lord for His departure, in order that that divine Spirit may come and

dwell with men. That necessity goes down deeper into the mysteries of

the divinity and of the processes and order of divine revelation than

it is given to us to follow. But though we can only speak superficially

and fragmentarily about such a matter, let me just remind you, in the

briefest possible words, of what Scripture plainly declares to us with

regard to this high and, in its fullness, ineffable matter. It tells us

that the complete work of Jesus Christ--not merely His coming upon

earth, or His life amongst men, but also His sacrificial death upon the

Cross--was the necessary preliminary, and in some sense procuring

cause, of the gift of that divine Spirit. It tells us--and there we are

upon ground on which we can more fully verify the statement--that His

work must be completed ere that Spirit can be sent, because the word is

the Spirit's weapon for the world, and the revelation of God in Jesus

must be ended, ere the application of that revelation, which is the

Spirit's work, can be begun in its full energy.

It tells us, further, (and there our eyesight fails, and we have to

accept what we are told), that Jesus Christ must ascend on high and be

at the right hand of God, ere He can pour down upon men the fullness of

the Spirit which dwelt uncommunicated in Him in the time of His earthly

humiliation. Thou hast ascended up on high,' and therefore Thou hast

given gifts to men.' We accept the declaration, not knowing all the

deep necessity in the divine Nature on which it rests, but believing

it, because He in whom we have confidence has declared it to us.

And we are further told--and there our experience may, in some degree,

verify the statement,--that only those, in whose hearts there is union

to Jesus Christ by faith in His completed work and ascended glory, are

capable of receiving that divine gift. So every way, both as regards

the depths of Deity and the processes of revelation, and as regards the

power of the humanity of Christ to impart His Spirit, and as regards

the capacity of us poor recipients to receive it, the words of my text

seem to be confirmed, and we can, though not with full insight, at any

rate with full faith, accept the statement, If I go not away, the

Comforter will not come to you.'

That coming is gain. It teaches a deeper knowledge of Him. It teaches

and gives a fuller possession of the life of righteousness which is

like His own. It draws us into the fellowship of the Son.

III. Lastly, note here the threefold conflict of the Spirit through the

Church with the world.

When He is come He will convict the world' in respect of sin and of

righteousness and of judgment.' By the reproof,' or rather conviction,'

which is spoken about here, is meant the process by which certain facts

are borne in upon men's understanding and consciences, and, along with

these facts, the conviction of error and fault in reference to them. It

is no mere process of demonstration of an intellectual truth, but it is

a process of conviction of error in respect to great moral and

religious truth, and of manifestation of the truths in regard to which

the error and the sin have been committed. So we have here the triple

division of the great work which the divine Spirit does, through

Christian men and women, in the world.

He shall convict the world of sin.' The outstanding first

characteristic of the whole Gospel message is the new gravity which it

attaches to the fact of sin, the deeper meaning which it gives to the

word, and the larger scope which it shows its blighting influences to

have had in humanity. Apart from the conviction of sin by the Spirit

using the word proclaimed by disciples, the world has scarcely a notion

of what sin is, its inwardness, its universality, the awfulness of it

as a fact affecting man's whole being and all his relations to God. All

these conceptions are especially the product of Christian truth.

Without it, what does the world know about the poison of sin? And what

does it care about the poison until the conviction has been driven home

to the reluctant consciousness of mankind by the Spirit wielding the

word? This conviction comes first in the divine order. I do not say

that the process of turning a man of the world into a member of

Christ's Church always begins, as a matter of fact, with the conviction

of sin. I believe it most generally does so; but without insisting upon

a pedantic adherence to a sequence, and without saying a word about the

depth and intensity of such a conviction, I am here to assert that a

Christianity which is not based upon the conviction of sin is an

impotent Christianity, and will be of very little use to the men who

profess it, and will have no power to propagate itself in the world.

Everything in our conception of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and of His

work for us depends upon what we think about this primary fact of man's

condition, that he is a sinful man. The root of all heresy lies there.

Every error that has led away men from Jesus Christ and His Cross may

be traced up to defective notions of sin and a defective realisation of

it. If I do not feel as the Bible would have me feel, that I am a

sinful man, I shall think differently of Jesus Christ and of my need of

Him, and of what He is to me. Christianity may be to me a system of

beautiful ethics, a guide for life, a revelation of much precious

truth, but it will not be the redemptive power without which I am lost.

And Jesus Christ will be shorn of His brightest beams, unless I see Him

as the Redeemer of my soul from sin, which else would destroy and is

destroying it. Is Christianity merely a better morality? Is it merely a

higher revelation of the divine Nature? Or does it do something as well

as say something, and what does it do? Is Jesus Christ only a Teacher,

a Wise Man, an Example, a Prophet, or is He the Sacrifice for the sins

of the world? Oh, brethren, we must begin where this text begins; and

our whole conception of Him and of His work for us must be based upon

this fact, that we are sinful and lost, and that Jesus Christ, by His

sweet and infinite love and all-powerful sacrifice, is our soul's

Redeemer and our only Hope. The world has to be convicted and convinced

of sin as the first step to its becoming a Church.

The next step of this divine Spirit's conviction is that which

corresponds to the consciousness of sin, the dawning upon the darkened

soul of the blessed sunrise of righteousness. The triple subjects of

conviction must necessarily belong to the world of which our Lord is

speaking. It must be the world that is convinced, and it must be the

world's sin and the world's righteousness and the world's judgment of

which my text speaks. How, then, can there follow on the conviction of

sin as mine a conviction of righteousness as mine? I know but one way,

Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which

is of God through faith.' When a man is convinced of sin, there will

dawn upon the heart the wondrous thought that a righteousness may be

his, given to him from above, which will sweep away all his sin and

make him righteous as Christ is righteous. That conviction will never

awake in its blessed and hope-giving power unless it be preceded by the

other. It is of no use to exhibit medicine to a man who does not know

himself diseased. It is of no use to talk about righteousness to a man

who has not found himself to be a sinner. And it is of as little use to

talk to a man of sin unless you are ready to tell him of a

righteousness that will cover all his sin. The one conviction without

the other is misery, the second without the first is irrelevant and far

away.

The world as a world has but dim and inadequate conceptions of what

righteousness is. A Pharisee is its type, or a man that keeps a clean

life in regard to great transgressions; a whited sepulchre of some sort

or other. The world apart from Christ has but languid desires after

even the poor righteousness that it understands, and the world apart

from Christ is afflicted by a despairing scepticism as to the

possibility of ever being righteous at all. And there are men listening

to me now in every one of these three conditions--not caring to be

righteous, not understanding what it is to be righteous, and cynically

disbelieving that it is possible to be so. My brother, here comes the

message to you--first, Thou art sinful; second, God's righteousness

lies at thy side to take and wear if thou wilt.

The last of these triple convictions is judgment.' If there be in the

world these two things both operating, sin and righteousness, and if

the two come together, what then? If there is to be a collision, as

there must be, which will go down? Christ tells us that this divine

Spirit will teach us that righteousness will triumph over sin, and that

there will be a judgment which will destroy that which is the weaker,

though it seems the stronger. Now I take it that the judgment which is

spoken about here is not merely a future retribution beyond the grave,

but that, whilst that is included, and is the principal part of the

idea, we are always to regard the judgment of the hereafter as being

prepared for by the continual judgment here.

And so there are two thoughts, a blessed one and a terrible one,

wrapped up in that word--a blessed thought for us sinful men, inasmuch

as we may be sure that the divine righteousness, which is given to us,

will judge us and separate us day by day from our sins; and a terrible

thought, inasmuch as if I, a sinful man, do not make friends with and

ally myself to the divine righteousness which is proffered to me, I

shall one day have to front it on the other side of the flood, when the

contact must necessarily be to me destruction.

Time does not allow me to dwell upon these solemn matters as I fain

would, but let me gather all I have been feebly trying to say to you

now into one sentence. This threefold conviction, in conscience,

understanding, and heart, of sin which is mine, of righteousness which

may be mine, and of judgment which must be mine--this threefold

conviction is that which makes the world into a Church. It is the

message of Christianity to each of us. How do you stand to it? Do you

hearken to the Spirit who is striving to convince you of these? Or do

you gather yourselves together into an obstinate, close-knit unbelief,

or a loose-knit indifference which is as impenetrable? Beware that you

resist not the Spirit of God!

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THE CONVICTING FACTS

Of sin, because they believe not on Me; Of righteousness, because I go

to My Father, and ye see Me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of

this world is judged.'--JOHN xvi. 9-11.

Our Lord has just been telling His disciples how He will equip them, as

His champions, for their conflict with the world. A divine Spirit is

coming to them who will work in them and through them; and by their

simple and unlettered testimony will convict,' or convince, the mass of

ungodly men of error and crime in regard to these three things--sin,

righteousness, and judgment.

He now advances to tell them that this threefold conviction which they,

as counsel for the prosecution, will establish as against the world at

the bar, will be based upon three facts: first, a truth of experience;

second, a truth of history; third, a truth of revelation, all three

facts having reference to Jesus Christ and His relation to men.

Now these three facts are--the world's unbelief; Christ's ascension and

session at the right hand of God; and the judgment of the prince of

this world.' If we remember that what our Lord is here speaking about

is the work of a divine Spirit through the ministration of believing

men, then Pentecost with its thousands pricked to the heart,' and the

Roman ruler who trembled, as the prisoner reasoned of righteousness and

judgment to come,' are illustrations of the way in which the humble

disciples towered above the pride and strength of the world, and from

criminals at its bar became its accusers.

These three facts are the staple and the strength of the Christian

ministry. These three facts are misapprehended, and have failed to

produce their right impression, unless they have driven home to our

consciences and understandings the triple conviction of my text. And so

I come to you with the simple questions which are all-important for

each of us: Have you looked these three facts in the face--unbelief,

the ascended Christ, a judged prince of the world, and have you learned

their meaning as it bears on your own character and religious life?

I. The first point here is the rejection of Jesus Christ as the climax

of the world's sin.

Strange words! They are in some respects the most striking instance of

that gigantic self-assertion of our Lord, of which we have had occasion

to see so many examples in these valedictory discourses. The world is

full of all unrighteousness and wickedness, lust and immorality,

intemperance, cruelty, hatred; all manner of buzzing evils that stink

and sting around us. But Jesus Christ passes them all by and points to

a mere negative thing, to an inward thing, to the attitude of men

towards Himself; and He says, If you want to know what sin is, look at

that!' There is the worst of all sins. There is a typical instance of

what sin is, in which, as in some anatomical preparation, you may see

all its fibres straightened out and made visible. Look at that if you

want to know what the world is, and what the world's sin is.

Some of us do not think that it is sin at all; and tell us that man is

no more responsible for his belief than he is for the colour of his

hair, and suchlike talk. Well, let me put a very plain question: What

is it that a man turns away from when he turns away from Jesus Christ?

The plainest, the loveliest, the loftiest, the perfectest revelation of

God in His beauty and completeness that ever dawned, or ever will dawn

upon creation. He rejects that. Anything more? Yes! He turns away from

the loveliest human life that ever was, or will be, lived. Anything

more? Yes! He turns away from a miracle of self-sacrificing love, which

endured the Cross for enemies, and willingly embraced agony and shame

and death for the sake of those who inflicted them upon Him. Anything

more? Yes! He turns away from hands laden with, and offering him, the

most precious and needful blessings that a poor soul on earth can

desire or expect.

And if this be true, if unbelief in Jesus Christ be indeed all this

that I have sketched out, another question arises, What does such an

attitude and act indicate as to the rejector? He stands in the presence

of the loveliest revelation of the divine nature and heart, and he sees

no light in it. Why, but because he has blinded his eyes and cannot

behold? He is incapable of seeing God manifest in the flesh,' because

he loves the darkness rather than the light.' He turns away from the

revelation of the loveliest and most self-sacrificing love. Why, but

because he bears in himself a heart cased with brass and triple steel

of selfishness, against the manifestation of love? He turns away from

the offered hands heaped with the blessings that he needs. Why, but

because he does not care for the gifts that are offered? Forgiveness,

cleansing, purity a heaven which consists in the perfecting of all

these, have no attractions for him. The fugitive Israelites in the

wilderness said, We do not want your light, tasteless manna. It may do

very well for angels, but we have been accustomed to garlic and onions

down in Egypt. They smell strong, and there is some taste in them. Give

us them.' And so some of you say, The offer of pardon is of no use to

me, for I am not troubled with my sin. The offer of purity has no

attraction to me, for I rather like the dirt and wallowing in it. The

offer of a heaven of your sort is but a dreary prospect to me. And so I

turn away from the hands that offer precious things.' The man who is

blind to the God that beams, lambent and loving, upon him in the face

of Jesus Christ--the man who has no stirrings of responsive gratitude

for the great outpouring of love upon the Cross--the man who does not

care for anything that Jesus Christ can give him, surely, in turning

away, commits a real sin.

I do not deny, of course, that there may be intellectual difficulties

cropping up in connection with the acceptance of the message of

salvation in Jesus Christ, but as, on the one hand, I am free to admit

that many a man may be putting a true trust in Christ which is joined

with a very hesitant grasp of some of the things which, to me, are the

very essence and heart of the Gospel; so, on the other side, I would

have you remember that there is necessarily a moral quality in our

attitude to all moral and religious truth; and that sin does not cease

to be sin because its doer is a thinker or has systematised his

rejection into a creed. Though it is not for us to measure motives and

to peer into hearts, at the bottom there lies what Christ Himself put

His finger on: Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.'

Then, still further, let me remind you that our Lord here presents this

fact of man's unbelief as being an instance in which we may see what

the real nature of sin is. To use learned language, it is a typical'

sin. In all other acts of sin you get the poison manipulated into

various forms, associated with other elements, disguised more or less.

But here, because it is purely an inward act having relation to Jesus

Christ, and to God manifested in Him, and not done at the bidding of

the animal nature, or of any of the other strong temptations and

impulses which hurry men into gross and coarse forms of manifest

transgression, you get sin in its essence. Belief in Christ is the

surrender of myself. Sin is living to myself rather than to God. And

there you touch the bottom. All those different kinds of sin, however

unlike they may be to one another--the lust of the sensualist, the

craft of the cheat, the lie of the deceitful, the passion of the

unregulated man, the avarice of the miser--all of them have this one

common root, a diseased and bloated regard to self. The definition of

sin is,--living to myself and making myself my own centre. The

definition of faith is,--making Christ my centre and living for Him.

Therefore, if you want to know what is the sinfulness of sin, there it

is. And if I may use such a word in such a connection, it is all packed

away in its purest form in the act of rejecting that Lord.

Brother, it is no exaggeration to say that, when you have summoned up

before you the ugliest forms of man's sins that you can fancy, this one

overtops them all, because it presents in the simplest form the

mother-tincture of all sins, which, variously coloured and perfumed and

combined, makes the evil of them all. A heap of rotting, poisonous

matter is offensive to many senses, but the colourless, scentless,

tasteless drop has the poison in its most virulent form, and is not a

bit less virulent, though it has been learnedly distilled and

christened with a scientific name, and put into a dainty jewelled

flask. This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and

men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.' I

lay that upon the hearts and consciences of some of my present hearers

as the key to their rejection or disregard of Christ and His salvation.

II. Now, secondly, notice the ascension of Jesus Christ as the pledge

and the channel of the world's righteousness--Because I go to the

Father, and ye see Me no more.'

He speaks as if the process of departure were already commenced. It had

three stages--death, resurrection, ascension; but these three are all

parts of the one departure. And so He says: Because, in the future,

when ye go forth to preach in My name, I shall be there with the

Father, having finished the work for which He sent Me; therefore you

will convince the world of righteousness.'

Now let me put that briefly in two forms. First of all, the fact of an

ascended Christ is the guarantee and proof of His own complete

fulfilment of the ideal of a righteous man. Or to put it into simpler

words, suppose Jesus Christ is dead; suppose that He never rose from

the grave; suppose that His bones mouldered in some sepulchre; suppose

that there had been no ascension--would it be possible to believe that

He was other than an ordinary man? And would it be possible to believe

that, however beautiful these familiar records of His life, and however

lovely the character which they reveal, there was really in Him no sin

at all? A dead Christ means a Christ who, like the rest of us, had His

limitations and His faults. But, on the other hand, if it be true that

He sprang from the grave because it was not possible that He should be

holden of it,' and because in His nature there was no proclivity to

death, since there had been no indulgence in sin; and if it be true

that He ascended up on high because that was His native sphere, and He

rose to it as naturally as the water in the valley will rise to the

height of the hill from which it has descended, then we can see that

God has set His seal upon that life by that resurrection and ascension;

and as we gaze on Him swept up heavenward by His own calm power, a

light falls backward upon all His earthly life, upon His claims to

purity, and to union with the Father, and we say, Surely this was a

perfectly righteous Man.'

And further let me remind you that with the supernatural facts of our

Lord's resurrection and ascension stands or falls the possibility of

His communicating any of His righteousness to us sinful men. If there

be no such possibility, what does Jesus Christ's beauty of character

matter to me? Nothing! I shall have to stumble on as best I can,

sometimes ashamed and rebuked, sometimes stimulated and sometimes

reduced to despair, by looking at the record of His life. If He be

lying dead in a forgotten grave, and hath not ascended up on high,'

then there can come from His history and past nothing other in kind,

though, perhaps, a little more in degree, than comes from the history

and the past of the beautiful and white souls that have sometimes lived

in the world. He is a saint like them, He is a teacher like them, He is

a prophet like some of them, and we have but to try our best to copy

that marble purity and white righteousness. But if He hath ascended up

on high, and sits there, wielding the forces of the universe, as we

believe He does, then to Him belongs the divine prerogative of

imparting His nature and His character to them that love Him. Then His

righteousness is not a solitary, uncommunicative perfectness for

Himself, but like a sun in the heavens, which streams out vivifying and

enlightening rays to all that seek His face. If it be true that Christ

has risen, then it is also true that you and I, convicted of sin, and

learning our weakness and our faults, may come to Him, and by the

exercise of that simple and yet omnipotent act of faith, may ally our

incompleteness with His perfectness, our sin with His righteousness,

our emptiness with His fullness, and may have all the grace and the

beauty of Jesus Christ passing over into us to be the Spirit of life in

us, making us free from the law of sin and death.' If Christ be risen,

His righteousness may be the world's; if Christ be not risen, His

righteousness is useless to any but to Himself.

My brother, wed yourself to that dear Lord by faith in Him, and His

righteousness will become yours, and you will be found in Him without

spot and blameless,' clothed with white raiment like His own, and

sharing in the Throne which belongs to the righteous Christ.

III. Lastly, notice the judgment of the world's prince as the prophecy

of the judgment of the world.

We are here upon ground which is only made known to us by the

revelation of Scripture. We began with a fact of man's experience; we

passed on to a fact of history; now we have a fact certified to us only

on Christ's authority.

The world has a prince. That ill-omened and chaotic agglomeration of

diverse forms of evil has yet a kind of anarchic order in it, and, like

the fabled serpent's locks on the Gorgon head, they intertwine and

sting one another, and yet they are a unity. We hear very little about

the prince of the world' in Scripture. Mercifully the existence of such

a being is not plainly revealed until the fact of Christ's victory over

him is revealed. But however ludicrous mediaeval and vulgar

superstitions may have made the notion, and however incredible the

tremendous figure painted by the great Puritan poet has proved to be,

there is nothing ridiculous, and nothing that we have the right to say

is incredible, in the plain declarations that came from Christ's lips

over and over again, that the world, the aggregate of ungodly men, has

a prince.

And then my text tells us that that prince is judged.' The Cross did

that, as Jesus Christ over and over again indicates, sometimes in plain

words, as Now is the judgment of this world,' Now is the prince of this

world cast out'; sometimes in metaphor, as I beheld Satan as lightning

fall from heaven,' First bind the strong man and then spoil his house.'

We do not know how far-reaching the influences of the Cross may be, and

what they may have done in those dark regions, but we know that since

that Cross, the power of evil in the world has been broken in its

centre, that God has been disclosed, that new forces have been lodged

in the heart of humanity, which only need to be developed in order to

overcome the evil. We know that since that auspicious day when He

spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly and

leading them in triumph,' even when He was nailed upon the Cross, the

history of the world has been the judgment of the world. Hoary

iniquities have toppled into the ceaseless washing sea of divine love

which has struck against their bases. Ancient evils have vanished, and

more are on the point of vanishing. A loftier morality, a higher notion

of righteousness, a deeper conception of sin, new hopes for the world

and for men, have dawned upon mankind; and the prince of the world is

led bound, as it were, at the victorious chariot wheels. The central

fortress has been captured, and the rest is an affair of outposts.

My text has for its last word this--the prince's judgment prophesies

the world's future judgment. The process which began when Jesus Christ

died has for its consummation the divine condemnation of all the evil

that still afflicts humanity, and its deprivation of authority and

power to injure. A final judgment will come, and that it will is

manifested by the fact that Christ, when He came in the form of a

servant and died upon the Cross, judged the prince. When He comes in

the form of a King on the great White Throne He will judge the world

which He has delivered from its prince.

That thought, my brother, ought to be a hope to us all. Are you glad

when you think that there is a day of judgment coming? Does your heart

leap up when you realise the fact that the righteousness, which is in

the heavens, is sure to conquer and coerce and secure under the hatches

the sin that is riding rampant through the world? It was a joy and a

hope to men who did not know half as much of the divine love and the

divine righteousness as we do. They called upon the rocks and the hills

to rejoice, and the trees of the forest to clap their hands before the

Lord, for He cometh to judge the world.' Does your heart throb a glad

Amen to that?

It ought to be a hope; it is a fear; and there are some of us who do

not like to have the conviction driven home to us, that the end of the

strife between sin and righteousness is that Jesus Christ shall judge

the world and take unto Himself His eternal kingdom.

But, my friends, hope or fear, it is a fact, as certain in the future,

as the Cross is sure in the past, or the Throne in the present. Let me

ask you this question, the question which Christ has sent all His

servants to ask--Have you loathed your sin? have you opened your heart

to Christ's righteousness? If you have, when men's hearts are failing

them for fear, and they call on the rocks and the hills to cover them

from the face of Him that sitteth upon the Throne,' you will have a

song as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept,' and lift up your

heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.' Herein is our love made

perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the day of judgment.'

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THE GUIDE INTO ALL TRUTH

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into

all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall

hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come. He

shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto

you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that

He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you.'--JOHN xvi. 12-15.

This is our Lord's last expansion, in these discourses, of the great

promise of the Comforter which has appeared so often in them. First, He

was spoken of simply as dwelling in Christ's servants, without any more

special designation of His work than was involved in the name. Then,

His aid was promised, to remind the Apostles of the facts of Christ's

life, especially of His words; and so the inspiration and authority of

the four Gospels were certified for us. Then He was further promised as

the witness in the disciples to Jesus Christ. And, finally, in the

immediately preceding context, we have His office of convincing,' or

convicting, the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.'

And now we come to that gracious and gentle work which that divine

Spirit is declared by Christ to do, not only for that little group

gathered round Him then, but for all those who trust themselves to His

guidance. He is to be the Spirit of truth' to all the ages, who in

simple verity will help true hearts to know and love the truth. There

are three things in the words before us--first, the avowed

incompleteness of Christ's own teaching; second, the completeness of

the truth into which the Spirit of truth guides; and, last, the unity

of these two.

I. First, then, we have here the avowed incompleteness of Christ's own

teaching.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.'

Now in an earlier portion of these great discourses, we have our Lord

asserting that all things whatsoever He had heard of the Father He had

made known' unto His servants. How do these two representations

harmonise? Is it possible to make them agree? Surely, yes. There is a

difference between the germ and the unfolded flower. There is a

difference between principles and the complete development of these. I

suppose you may say that all Euclid is in the axioms and definitions. I

suppose you may also say that when you have learned the axioms and

definitions, there are many things yet to be said, of which you have

not grown to the apprehension. And so our Lord, as far as His frankness

was concerned, and as far as the fundamental and seminal principles of

all religious truth were concerned, had even then declared all that He

had heard of the Father. But yet, in so far as the unfolding of these

was concerned, the tracing of their consequences, the exhibition of

their harmonies, the weaving of them into an ordered whole in which a

man's understanding could lodge, there were many things yet to be said,

which that handful of men were not able to bear. And so our Lord

Himself here declares that His words spoken on earth are not His

completed revelation.

Of course we find in them, as I believe, hints profound and pregnant,

which only need to be unfolded and smoothed out, as it were, and their

depths fathomed, in order to lead to all that is worthy of being called

Christian truth. But upon many points we cannot but contrast the

desultory, brief, obscure references which came from the Master's lips

with the more systematised, full, and accurate teaching which came from

the servants. The great crucial instance of all is the comparative

reticence which our Lord observed in reference to His sacrificial

death, and the atoning character of His sufferings for the world. I do

not admit that the silence of the Gospels upon that subject is fairly

represented when it is said to be absolute. I believe that that silence

has been exaggerated by those who have no desire to accept that

teaching. But the distinction is plain and obvious, not to be ignored,

rather to be marked as being fruitful of blessed teaching, between the

way in which Christ speaks about His Cross, and the way in which the

Apostles speak about it after Pentecost.

What then? My text gives us the reason. You cannot bear them now.' Now

the word rendered bear' here does not mean bear' in the sense of

endure, or tolerate, or suffer, but bear' in the sense of carry. And

the metaphor is that of some weight--it may be gold, but still it is a

weight--laid upon a man whose muscles are not strong enough to sustain

it. It crushes rather than gladdens. So because they had not strength

enough to carry, had not capacity to receive, our Lord was lovingly

reticent.

There is a great principle involved in this saying--that revelation is

measured by the moral and spiritual capacities of the men who receive

it. The light is graduated for the diseased eye. A wise oculist does

not flood that eye with full sunshine, but he puts on veils and

bandages, and closes the shutters, and lets a stray beam, ever growing

as the curve is perfected, fall upon it. So from the beginning until

the end of the process of revelation there was a correspondence between

men's capacity to receive the light and the light that was granted; and

the faithful use of the less made them capable of receiving the

greater, and as soon as they were capable of receiving it, it came. To

him that hath shall be given.' In His love, then, Christ did not load

these men with principles that they could not carry, nor feed them with

strong meat' instead of milk,' until they were able to bear it.

Revelation is progressive, and Christ is reticent, from regard to the

feebleness of His listeners.

Now that same principle is true in a modified form about us. How many

things there are which we sometimes feel we should like to know, that

God has not told us, because we have not yet grown up to the point at

which we could apprehend them! Compassed with these veils of flesh and

weakness, groping amidst the shadows of time, bewildered by the

cross-lights that fall upon us from so many surrounding objects, we

have not yet eyes able to behold the ineffable glory. He has many

things to say to us about that blessed future, and that strange and

awful life into which we are to step when we leave this poor world, but

ye cannot bear them now.' Let us wait with patience until we are ready

for the illumination. For two things go to make revelation, the light

that reveals and the eye that beholds.

Now one remark before I go further. People tell us, Your modern

theology is not in the Gospels.' And they say to us, as if they had

administered a knockdown blow, We stick by Jesus, not Paul.' Well, as I

said, I do not admit that there is no Pauline' teaching in the Gospels,

but I do confess there is not much. And I say, What then?' Why, this,

then--it is exactly what we were to expect; and people who reject the

apostolic form of Christian teaching because it is not found in the

Gospels are flying in the face of Christ's own teaching. You say you

will take His words as the only source of religious truth. You are

going clean contrary to His own words in saying so. Remember that He

proclaimed their incompleteness, and referred us, for the fuller

knowledge of the truth of God, to a subsequent Teacher.

II. So, secondly, mark here the completeness of the truth into which

the Spirit guides.

I must trouble you with just a word or two of remark as to the language

of our text. Note the personality, designation, and office of this new

Teacher. He,' not it,' He, is the Spirit of truth whose characteristic

and weapon is truth. He will guide you'--suggesting a loving hand put

out to lead; suggesting the graciousness, the gentleness, the

gradualness of the teaching. Into all truth --that is no promise of

omniscience, but it is the assurance of gradual and growing

acquaintance with the spiritual and moral truth which is revealed, such

as may be fitly paralleled by the metaphor of men passing into some

broad land, of which there is much still to be possessed and explored.

Not to-day, nor to-morrow, will all the truth belong to those whom the

Spirit guides; but if they are true to His guidance, to-morrow shall be

as this day, and much more abundant,' and the land will all be

traversed at the last. He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He

shall hear that shall He speak.' Mark the parallel between the relation

of the Spirit-Teacher to Jesus, and the relation of Jesus to the

Father. Of Him, too, it is said by Himself, All things whatsoever I

have heard of the Father I have declared unto you.' The mark of Satan

is, He speaketh of his own'; the mark of the divine Teacher is, He

speaketh not of Himself, but whatsoever things,' in all their variety,

in their continuity, in their completeness, He shall hear,'--where?

yonder in the depths of the Godhead--whatsoever things He shall hear

there,' He shall show to you, and especially, He will show you the

things that are to come.' These Apostles were living in a revolutionary

time. Men's hearts were failing them for fear of the things that were

coming on the earth.' Step by step they would be taught the evolving

glory of that kingdom which they were to be the instruments in

founding; and step by step there would be spread out before them the

vision of the future and all the wonder that should be, the world that

was to come, the new constitution which Christ was to establish.

Now, if that be the interpretation, however inadequate, of these great

and wonderful words, there are but two things needful to say about

them. One is that this promise of a complete guidance into truth

applies in a peculiar and unique fashion to the original hearers of it.

I ventured to say that one of the other promises of the Spirit, which I

quoted in my introductory remarks, was the certificate to us of the

inspiration and reliableness of these Four Gospels. And I now remark

that in these words, in their plain and unmistakable meaning, there lie

involved the inspiration and authority of the Apostles as teachers of

religious truth. Here we have the guarantee for the authority over our

faith, of the words which came from these men, and from the other who

was added to their number on the Damascus road. They were guided into

all the truth,' and so our task is to receive the truth into which they

were guided.

The Acts of the Apostles is the best commentary on these words of my

text. There you see how these men rose at once into a new region; how

the truths about their Master which had been bewildering puzzles to

them flashed into light; how the Cross, which had baffled and dispersed

them, became at once the centre of union for themselves and for the

world; how the obscure became lucid, and Christ's death and the

resurrection stood forth to them as the great central facts of the

world's salvation. In the book of the Apocalypse we have part of the

fulfilment of this closing promise: He will show you things to come';

when the Seer was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day,' and the heavens

were opened, and the history of the Church (whether in chronological

order, or in the exhibition of symbols of the great forces which shall

be arrayed for and against it, over and over again, to the end of time,

does not at present matter), was spread before Him as a scroll.

Now, dear friends, this great principle of my text has a modified

application also to us all. For that divine Spirit is given to each of

us if we will use Him, is given to any and every man who desires Him,

does dwell in Christian hearts, though, alas! so many of us are so

little conscious of Him, and does teach us the truth which Christ

Himself left incomplete.

Only let me make one remark here. We do not stand on the same level as

these men who clustered round Christ on His road to Gethsemane, and

received the first fruits of the promise--the Spirit. They, taught by

that divine Guide and by experience, were led into the deeper

apprehension of the words and the deeds, of the life and the death, of

Jesus Christ our Lord. We, taught by that same Spirit, are led into a

deeper apprehension of the words which they spake, both in recording

and interpreting the facts of Christ's life and death.

And so we come sharp up to this, If any man thinketh himself to be a

prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I

speak unto him are the commandments of the Lord.' That is how an

Apostle put his relation to the other possessors of the divine Spirit.

And you and I have to take this as the criterion of all true possession

of the Spirit of God, that it bows in humble submission to the

authoritative teaching of this book.

III. Lastly, we have here our Lord pointing out the unity of these two.

In the verse on which I have just been commenting He says nothing about

Himself, and it might easily appear to the listeners as if these two

sources of truth, His own incomplete teaching, and the full teaching of

the divine Spirit, were independent of, if not opposed to, one another.

So in the last words of our text He shows us the blending of the two

streams, the union of the two beams.

He shall glorify Me.' Think of a man saying that! The Spirit who will

come from God and guide men into all truth' has for His distinctive

office the glorifying of Jesus Christ. So fair is He, so good, so

radiant, that to make Him known is to glorify Him. The glorifying of

Christ is the ultimate and adequate purpose of everything that God the

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has done, because the glorifying of Christ

is the glorifying of God, and the blessing of the eyes that behold His

glory.

For He shall take of Mine, and show it unto you.' All which that divine

Spirit brings is Christ's. So, then, there is no new revelation, only

the interpretation of the revelation. The text is given, and its last

word was spoken, when the cloud received Him out of their sight,' and

henceforward all is commentary. The Spirit takes of Christ's; applies

the principles, unfolds the deep meaning of words and deeds, and

especially the meaning of the mystery of the Cradle, and the tragedy of

the Cross, and the mystery of the Ascension, as declaring that Christ

is the Son of God, the Sacrifice for the world. Christ said, I am the

Truth.' Therefore, when He promises, He will guide you into all the

truth,' we may fairly conclude that the truth' into which the Spirit

guides is the personal Christ. It is the whole Christ, the whole truth,

that we are to receive from that divine Teacher; growing up day by day

into the capacity to grasp Christ more firmly, to understand Him

better, and by love and trust and obedience to make Him more entirely

our own. We are like the first settlers upon some great

island-continent. There is a little fringe of population round the

coast, but away in the interior are leagues of virgin forests and

fertile plains stretching to the horizon, and snow-capped summits

piercing the clouds, on which no foot has ever trod. He will guide you

into all truth'; through the length and breadth of the boundless land,

the person and the work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

All things that the Father hath are Mine, therefore said I that He

shall take of Mine and show it unto you.' What awful words! A divine,

teaching Spirit can only teach concerning God. Christ here explains the

paradox of His words preceding, in which, if He were but human, He

seems to have given that teaching Spirit an unworthy office, by

explaining that whatsoever is His is God's, and whatsoever is God's is

His.

My brother! do you believe that? Is that what you think about Jesus

Christ? He puts out here an unpresumptuous hand, and grasps all the

constellated glories of the divine Nature, and says, They are Mine';

and the Father looks down from heaven and says, Son! Thou art ever with

Me, and all that I have is Thine.' Do you answer, Amen! I believe it?'

Here are three lessons from these great words which I leave with you

without attempting to unfold them. One is, Believe a great deal more

definitely in, and seek a great deal more consciously and earnestly,

and use a great deal more diligently and honestly, that divine Spirit

who is given to us all. I fear me that over very large tracts of

professing Christendom to-day men stand up with very faltering lips and

confess, I believe in the Holy Ghost.' Hence comes much of the weakness

of our modern Christianity, of the worldliness of professing

Christians, and when for the time they ought to be teachers, they have

need that one teach them again which be the first principles of the

oracles of God.' Quench not, grieve not, despise not the Holy Spirit.'

Another lesson is, Use the Book that He uses--else you will not grow,

and He will have no means of contact with you.

And the last is, Try the spirits. If anything calling itself Christian

teaching comes to you and does not glorify Christ, it is

self-condemned. For none can exalt Him highly enough, and no teaching

can present Him too exclusively and urgently as the sole Salvation and

Life of the whole earth, And if it be, as my text tells us, that the

great teaching Spirit is to come, who is to guide us into all truth,'

and therein is to glorify Christ, and to show us the things that are

His, then it is also true, Hereby know we the Spirit of God. Every

spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of

God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in

the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of Antichrist.'

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CHRIST'S LITTLE WHILES'

A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and

ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of His

disciples among themselves, What is this that He saith unto us, A

little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and

ye shall see Me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore,

What is this that He saith, A little while? we cannot tell what He

saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him, and said unto

them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while,

and ye shall not see Me: and again a little while, and ye shall see

Me?'--JOHN xvi. 16-19.

A superficial glance at the former part of these verses may fail to

detect their connection with the great preceding promise of the Spirit

who is to guide the disciples into all truth.' They appear to stand

quite isolated and apart from that. But a little thought will bring out

an obvious connection. The first words of our text are really the

climax and crown of the promise of the Spirit; for that Spirit is to

guide into all the truth' by declaring to the disciples the things that

are Christ's, and in consequence of that ministration, they are to be

able to see their unseen Lord. So this is the loftiest thought of what

the divine Spirit does for the Christian heart, that it shows Him a

visible though absent Christ.

Then we have in the subsequent part of our text the blundering of the

bewildered disciples and the patient answer of the long-suffering

Teacher. So that there are these three points to take up: the times of

disappearance and of sight; the bewildered disciples; and the patient

Teacher.

I. First of all, then, note the deep teaching of our Lord here, about

the times of disappearance and of Sight.

The words are plain enough; the difficulty lies in the determination of

the periods to which they refer. He tells us that, after a brief

interval from the time at which He was speaking, there would come a

short parenthesis during which He was not to be seen; and that upon

that would follow a period of which no end is hinted at, during which

He is to be seen. The two words employed in the two consecutive

clauses, for sight,' are not the same, and so they naturally suggest

some difference in the manner of vision.

But the question arises, Where are the limits of these times of which

the Lord speaks? Now it is quite clear, I suppose, that the first of

the little whiles' is the few hours that intervened between His

speaking and the Cross. And it is equally clear that His death and

burial began, at all events, the period during which they were not to

see Him. But where does the second period begin, during which they are

to see Him? Is it at His resurrection or at His ascension, when the

process of going to the Father' was completed in all its stages; or at

Pentecost, when the Spirit, by whose ministration He was to be made

visible, was poured out? The answer is, perhaps, not to be restricted

to any one of these periods; but I think if we consider that all

disciples, in all ages, have a portion in all the rest of these great

discourses, and if we note the absence of any hint that the promised

seeing of Christ was ever to terminate, and if we mark the diversity of

words under which the two manners of vision are described, and, above

all, if we note the close connection of these words with those which

precede, we shall come to the conclusion that the full realisation of

this great promise of a visible Christ did not begin until that time

when the Spirit, poured out, opened the eyes of His servants, and they

saw His glory.' But however we settle the minor question of the

chronology of these periods, the great truth shines out here that,

through all the stretch of the ages, true hearts may truly see the true

Christ.

If we might venture to suppose that in our text the second of the

periods to which He refers, when they did not see Him, was not

coterminous with, but preceded, the second little while,' all would be

clear. Then the first little while' would be the few hours before the

Cross. Ye shall not see Me' would refer to the days in which He lay in

the tomb. Again, a little while' would point to that strange

transitional period between His death and His ascension, in which the

disciples had neither the close intercourse of earlier days nor the

spiritual communion of later ones. And the final period, Ye shall see

Me,' would cover the whole course of the centuries till He comes again.

However that may be, and I only offer it as a possible suggestion, the

thing that we want to fasten upon for ourselves is this--we all, if we

will, may have a vision of Christ as close, as real, as firmly

certifying us of His reality, and making as vivid an impression upon

us, as if He stood there, visible to our senses. And so, by this vision

splendid' we may be everywhere attended,' and whithersoever we go, have

burning before us the light of His countenance, in the sunshine of

which we shall walk.

Brother! that is personal Christianity--to see Jesus Christ, and to

live with the thrilling consciousness, printed deep and abiding upon

our spirits, that, in very deed, He is by our sides. O how that

conviction would make life strong and calm and noble and blessed! How

it would lift us up above temptation! He endured as seeing Him who is

Invisible.' What should terrify us if Christ stood before us? What

should charm us if we saw Him? Competing glories and attractions would

fade before His presence, as a dim candle dies at noon. It would make

all life full of a blessed companionship. Who could be solitary if he

saw Christ? or feel that life was dreary if that Friend was by his

side? It would fill our hearts with joy and strength, and make us

evermore blessed by the light of His countenance.

And how are we to get that vision? Remember the connection of my text.

It is because there is a divine Spirit to show men the things that are

Christ's that therefore, unseen, He is visible to the eye of faith. And

therefore the shortest and directest road to the vision of Jesus is the

submitting of heart and mind and spirit to the teaching of that divine

Spirit, who uses the record of the Scriptures as the means by which He

makes Jesus Christ known to us.

But besides this waiting upon that divine Teacher, let me remind you

that there are conditions of discipline which must be fulfilled upon

our parts, if any clear vision of Jesus Christ is to bless us pilgrims

in this lonely world. And the first of these conditions is--If you want

to see Jesus Christ, think about Him. Occupy your minds with Him. If

men in the city walk the pavements with their eyes fixed upon the

gutters, what does it matter though all the glories of a sunset are

dyeing the western sky? They will see none of them; and if Christ stood

beside you, closer to you than any other, if your eyes were fixed upon

the trivialities of this poor present, you would not see Him. If you

honestly want to see Christ, meditate upon Him.

And if you want to see Him, shut out competing objects, and the

dazzling cross-lights that come in and hide Him from us. There must be

a looking off unto Jesus.' There must be a rigid limitation, if not

excision, of other objects, if we are to grasp Him. If we would see,

and have our hearts filled with, the calm sublimity of the solemn,

white wedge that lifts itself into the far-off blue, we must not let

our gaze stop on the busy life of the valleys or the green slopes of

the lower Alps, but must lift it and keep it fixed aloft. Meditate upon

Him, and shut out other things.

If you want to see Christ, do His will. One act of obedience has more

power to clear a man's eyes than hours of idle contemplation; and one

act of disobedience has more power to dim his eyes than anything

besides. It is in the dusty common road that He draws near to us, and

the experience of those disciples that journeyed to Emmaus may be ours.

He meets us in the way, and makes our hearts burn within us.' The

experience of the dying martyr outside the city gate may be ours.

Sorrows and trials will rend the heavens if they be rightly borne, and

so we shall see Christ standing at the right hand of God.' Rebellious

tears blind our eyes, as Mary's did, so that she did not know the

Master and took Him for the gardener.' Submissive tears purge the eyes

and wash them clean to see His face. To do His will is the sovereign

method for beholding His countenance.

Brethren, is this our experience? You professing Christians, do you see

Christ? Are your eyes fixed upon Him? Do you go through life with Him

consciously nearer to you than any beside? Is He closer than the

intrusive insignificances of this fleeting present? Have you Him as

your continual Companion? Oh! when we contrast the difference between

the largeness of this promise--a promise of a thrilling consciousness

of His presence, of a vivid perception of His character, of an

unwavering certitude of His reality--and the fly-away glimpses and

wandering sight, and faint, far-off views, as of a planet weltering

amid clouds, which the most of Christian men have of Christ, what shame

should cover our faces, and how we should feel that if we have not the

fulfilment, it is our own fault! Blessed they of whom it is true that

they see no man any more save Jesus only'! and to whom all sorrow, joy,

care, anxiety, work, and repose are but the means of revealing that

sweet and all-sufficient Presence! I have set the Lord always before

me, therefore I shall not be moved.'

II. Now notice, secondly, these bewildered disciples.

We find, in the early portion of these discourses, that twice they

ventured to interrupt our Lord with more or less relevant questions,

but as the wonderful words flowed on, they seem to have been awed into

silence; and our Lord Himself almost complains of them that None of you

asketh Me, Whither goest Thou?' The inexhaustible truths that He had

spoken seem to have gone clear over their heads, but the verbal

repetition of the little whiles,' and the recurring ring of the

sentences, seem to have struck upon their ears. So passing by all the

great words, they fasten upon this minor thing, and whisper among

themselves, perhaps lagging behind on the road, as to what He means by

these little whiles.' The Revised Version is probably correct, or at

least it has strong manuscript authority in its favour, in omitting the

clause in our Lord's words, Because I go to the Father.' The disciples

seem to have quoted, not from the preceding verse, but from a verse a

little before that in the context, where He said that the Spirit will

convince the world of righteousness because I go to My Father, and ye

see Me no more.' The contradiction seems to strike them.

These disciples in their bewilderment seem to me to represent some very

common faults which we all commit in our dealing with the Lord's words,

and to one or two of these I turn for a moment.

Note this to begin with, how they pass by the greater truths in order

to fasten upon a smaller outstanding difficulty. They have no questions

to ask about the gifts of the Spirit, nor about the unity of Christ and

His disciples as represented in the vine and the branches, nor about

what He tells them of the love that lays down its life for its

friends.' But when He comes into the region of chronology, they are all

agog to know the when' about which He is so enigmatically speaking.

Now is not that exactly like us, and does not the Christianity of this

day very much want the hint to pay most attention to the greatest

truths, and let the little difficulties fall into their subordinate

place? The central truths of Christianity are the incarnation and

atonement of Jesus Christ. And yet outside questions, altogether

subordinate and, in comparison with this, unimportant, are filling the

attention and the thoughts of people at present to such an extent that

there is great danger of the central truth of all being either passed

by, or the reception of it being suspended on the clearing up of

smaller questions.

The truth that Christ is the Son of God, who has died for our

salvation, is the heart of the Gospel. And why should we make our faith

in that, and our living by it, contingent on the clearing up of certain

external and secondary questions; chronological, historical, critical,

philological, scientific, and the like? And why should men be so

occupied in jangling about the latter as that the towering supremacy,

the absolute independence, of the former should be lost sight of? What

would you think of a man in a fire who, when they brought the

fire-escape to him, said, I decline to trust myself to it, until you

first of all explain to me the principles of its construction; and,

secondly, tell me all about who made it; and, thirdly, inform me where

all the materials of which it is made came from?' But that is very much

what a number of people are doing to-day in reference to the Gospel of

our salvation,' when they demand that the small questions--on which the

central verity does not at all depend--shall be answered and settled

before they cast themselves upon that.

Another of the blunders of these disciples, in which they show

themselves as our brethren, is that they fling up the attempt to

apprehend the obscurity in a very swift despair. We cannot tell what He

saith, and we are not going to try any more. It is all cloud-land and

chaos together.'

Intellectual indolence, spiritual carelessness, deal thus with

outstanding difficulties, abandoning precipitately the attempt to grasp

them or that which lies behind them. And yet although there are no

gratuitous obscurities in Christ's teaching, He said a great many

things which could not possibly be understood at the time, in order

that the disciples might stretch up towards what was above them, and,

by stretching up, might grow. I do not think that it is good to break

down the children's bread too small. A wise teacher will now and then

blend with the utmost simplicity something that is just a little in

advance of the capacity of the listener, and so encourage a little hand

to stretch itself out, and the arm to grow because it is stretched. If

there are no difficulties there is no effort, and if there is no effort

there is no growth. Difficulties are there in order that we may grapple

with them, and truth is sometimes hidden in a well in order that we may

have the blessing of the search, and that the truth found after the

search may be more precious. The tropics, with their easy, luxuriant

growth, where the footfall turns up the warm soil, grow languid men,

and our less smiling latitude grows strenuous ones. Thank God that

everything is not easy, even in that which is meant for the revelation

of all truth to all men! Instead of turning tail at the first fence,

let us learn that it will do us good to climb, and that the fence is

there in order to draw forth our effort.

There is another point in which these bewildered disciples are

uncommonly like the rest of us; and that is that they have no patience

to wait for time and growth to solve the difficulty. They want to know

all about it now, or not at all. If they would wait for six weeks they

would understand, as they did. Pentecost explained it all. We, too, are

often in a hurry. There is nothing that the ordinary mind, and often

the educated mind, detests so much as uncertainty, and being

consciously baffled by some outstanding difficulty. And in order to

escape that uneasiness, men are dogmatical when they should be

doubtful, and positively asserting when it would be a great deal more

for the health of their souls and of their listeners to say, Well,

really I do not know, and I am content to wait.' So, on both sides of

great controversies, you get men who will not be content to let things

wait, for all must be made clear and plain to-day.

Ah, brethren! for ourselves, for our own intellectual difficulties, and

for the difficulties of the world, there is nothing like time and

patience. The mysteries that used to plague us when we were boys melted

away when we grew up. And many questions which trouble me to-day, and

through which I cannot find my way, if I lay them aside, and go about

my ordinary duties, and come back to them to-morrow with a fresh eye

and an unwearied brain, will have straightened themselves out and

become clear. We grow into our best and deepest convictions, we are not

dragged into them by any force of logic. So for our own sorrows,

questions, pains, griefs, and for all the riddle of this painful world,

Take it on trust a little while,

Thou soon shalt read the mystery right,

In the full sunshine of His smile.'

III. Lastly, and very briefly, a word about the patient Teacher.

Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him.' He knows all our

difficulties and perplexities. Perhaps it is His supernatural knowledge

that is indicated in the words before us, or perhaps it is merely that

He saw them whispering amongst themselves and so inferred their wish.

Be that as it may, we may take the comfort that we have to do with a

Teacher who accurately understands how much we understand and where we

grope, and will shape His teaching according to our necessities.

He had not a word of rebuke for the slowness of their apprehension. He

might well have said to them, O fools and slow of heart to believe!'

But that word was not addressed to them then, though two of them

deserved it and got it, after events had thrown light on His teaching.

He never rebukes us for either our stupidity or for our carelessness,

but has long patience' with us.

He does give them a kind of rebuke. Do ye inquire among yourselves?'

That is a hopeful source to go to for knowledge. Why did they not ask

Him, instead of whispering and muttering there behind Him, as if two

people equally ignorant could help each other to knowledge? Inquiry

among yourselves' is folly; to ask Him is wisdom. We can do much for

one another, but the deepest riddles and mysteries can only be wisely

dealt with in one way. Take them to Him, tell Him about them. Told to

Him, they often dwindle. They become smaller when they are looked at

beside Him, and He will help us to understand as much as may be

understood, and patiently to wait and leave the residue unsolved, until

the time shall come when we shall know even as we are known.'

In the context here, Jesus Christ does not explain to the disciples the

precise point that troubled them. Olivet and Pentecost were to do that;

but He gives them what will tide them over the time until the

explanation shall come, in triumphant hopes of a joy and peace that are

drawing near.

And so there is a great deal in all our lives, in His dealings with us,

in His revelation of Himself to us, that must remain mysterious and

unintelligible. But if we will keep close to Him, and speak plainly to

Him in prayer and communion about our difficulties, He will send us

triumphant hope and large confidence of a coming joy, that will float

us over the bar and make us feel that the burden is no longer painful

to carry. Much that must remain dark through life will be lightened

when we get yonder; for the vision here is not perfect, and the

knowledge here is as imperfect as the vision.

Dear friends! the one question for us all is, Do our eyes fix and

fasten on that dear Lord, and is it the description of our own whole

lives, that we see Him and walk with Him? Oh! if so, then life will be

blessed, and death itself will be but as a little while' when we shall

not see Him,' and then we shall open our eyes and behold Him close at

hand, whom we saw from afar, and with wandering eyes, amidst the mists

and illusions of earth. To see Him as He became for our sakes is heaven

on earth. To see Him as He is will be the heaven of heaven, and before

that Face, as the sun shining in His strength,' all sorrows,

difficulties, and mysteries will melt as morning mists.

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SORROW TURNED INTO JOY

Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the

world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall

be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because

her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she

remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the

world. And ye now, therefore, have sorrow; but I will see you again,

and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from

you.'--JOHN xvi. 20-22.

These words, to which we have come in the ordinary course of our

exposition, make an appropriate text for Easter Sunday. For their one

theme is the joy which began upon that day, and was continued in

increasing measure as the possession of Christ's servants after

Pentecost. Our Lord promises that the momentary sadness and pain shall

be turned into a swift and continual joy. He pledges His word for that,

and bids us believe it on His bare word. He illustrates it by that

tender and beautiful image which, in the pains and bliss of motherhood,

finds an analogy for the pains and bliss of the disciples, inasmuch as,

in both cases, pain leads directly to blessedness in which it is

forgotten. And He crowns His great promises by explaining to us what is

the deepest foundation of our truest gladness, I will see you again,'

and by declaring that such a joy is independent of all foes and all

externals, and your joy no man taketh from you.'

There are, then, two or three aspects of the Christian life as a glad

life which are set before us in these words, and to which I ask your

attention.

I. There is, first, the promise of a joy which is a transformed sorrow.

Your sorrow shall be turned into joy,' not merely that the one emotion

is substituted for the other, but that the one emotion, as it were,

becomes the other. This can only mean that that, which was the cause of

the one, reverses its action and becomes the cause of the opposite. Of

course the historical and immediate fulfilment of these words lies in

the double result of Christ's Cross upon His servants. For part of

three dreary days it was the occasion of their sorrow, their panic,

their despair; and then, all at once, when with a bound the mighty fact

of the resurrection dawned upon them, that which had been the occasion

for their deep grief, for their apparently hopeless despair, suddenly

became the occasion for a rapture beyond their dreams, and a joy which

would never pass. The Cross of Christ, which for some few hours was

pain, and all but ruin, has ever since been the centre of the deepest

gladness and confidence of a thousand generations.

I do not need to remind you, I suppose, of the value, as a piece of

evidence of the historical veracity of the Gospel story, of this sudden

change and complete revolution in the sentiments and emotions of that

handful of disciples. What was it that lifted them out of the pit? What

was it that revolutionised in a moment their notions of the Cross and

of its bearing upon them? What was it that changed downhearted,

despondent, and all but apostate, disciples into heroes and martyrs? It

was the one fact which Christendom commemorates to-day: the

resurrection of Jesus Christ. That was the element, added to the dark

potion, which changed it all in a moment into golden flashing light.

The resurrection was what made the death of Christ no longer the

occasion for the dispersion of His disciples, but bound them to Him

with a closer bond. And I venture to say that, unless the first

disciples were lunatics, there is no explanation of the changes through

which they passed in some eight-and-forty hours, except the

supernatural and miraculous fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

from the dead. That set a light to the thick column of smoke, and made

it blaze up a pillar of fire.' That changed sorrow into joy. The same

death which, before the resurrection, drew a pall of darkness over the

heavens, and draped the earth in mourning, by reason of that

resurrection which swept away the cloud and brought out the sunshine,

became the source of joy. A dead Christ was the Church's despair; a

dead and risen Christ is the Church's triumph, because He is the Christ

that died. . . and is alive for evermore.'

But, more generally, let me remind you how this very same principle,

which applies directly and historically to the resurrection of our

Lord, may be legitimately expanded so as to cover the whole ground of

devout men's sorrows and calamities. Sorrow is the first stage, of

which the second and completed stage is transformation into joy. Every

thundercloud has a rainbow lying in its depths when the sun smites upon

it. Our purest and noblest joys are transformed sorrows. The sorrow of

contrite hearts becomes the gladness of pardoned children; the sorrow

of bereaved, empty hearts may become the gladness of hearts filled with

God; and every grief that stoops upon our path may be, and will be, if

we keep near that dear Lord, changed into its own opposite, and become

the source of blessedness else unattainable. Every stroke of the

bright, sharp ploughshare that goes through the fallow ground, and

every dark winter's day of pulverising frost and lashing tempest and

howling wind, are represented in the broad acres, waving with the

golden grain. All your griefs and mine, brother, if we carry them to

the Master, will flash up into gladness and be "turned into joy."

II. Still further, another aspect here of the glad life of the true

Christian is, that it is a joy founded upon the consciousness that

Christ's eye is upon us.

I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice.' In other parts of

these closing discourses the form of the promise is the converse of

this, as for instance--Yet a little while, and ye shall see Me.' Here

Christ lays hold of the thought by the other handle, and says, I will

see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.' Now these two forms of

putting the same mutual relationship, of course, agree, in that they

both of them suggest, as the true foundation of the blessedness which

they promise, the fact of communion with a present Lord. But they

differ from one another in colouring, and in the emphasis which they

place upon the two parts of that communion. Ye shall see Me' fixes

attention upon us and our perception of Him. I will see you' fixes

attention rather upon Him and His beholding of us. Ye shall see Me'

speaks of our going out after Him and being satisfied in Him. I will

see you' speaks of His perfect knowledge, of His loving care, of His

tender, compassionate, complacent, ever-watchful eye resting upon us,

in order that He may communicate to us all needful good.

And so it requires a loving heart on our part, in order to find joy in

such a promise. His eyes are as a flame of fire,' and He sees all men;

but unless our hearts cleave to Him and we know ourselves to be knit to

Him by the tender bond of love from Him, accepted and treasured in our

souls, then I will see you again' is a threat and not a promise. It

depends upon the relation which we bear to Him, whether it is

blessedness or misery to think that He whose flaming eye reads all

men's sins and pierces through all hypocrisies and veils has it fixed

upon us. The sevenfold utterance of His words to the Asiatic

churches-the last recorded words of Jesus Christ-begins with I know thy

works.' It was no joy to the lukewarm professors at Laodicea, nor to

the church at Ephesus which had lost the freshness of its early love,

that the Master knew them; but to the faithful souls in Philadelphia,

and to the few in Sardis, who had not defiled their garments,' it was

blessedness and life to feel that they walked in the sunshine of His

face.

Is there any joy to us in the thought that the Lord Christ sees us? Oh!

if our hearts are really His, if our lives are as truly built on Him as

our profession of being Christians alleges that they are, then all that

we need for the satisfaction of our nature, for the supply of our

various necessities, or as an armour against temptation, and an amulet

against sorrow, will be given to us, in the belief that His eye is

fixed upon us. There is the foundation of the truest joy for men. There

be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the

light of Thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart

more than in the time when their corn and their wine abound.' One look

towards Christ will more than repay and abolish earth's sorrow. One

look from Christ will fill our hearts with sunshine. All tears are

dried on eyes that meet His. Loving hearts find their heaven in looking

into one another's faces, and if Christ be our love, our deepest and

purest joys will be found in His glance and our answering gaze.

If one could anyhow take a bit of the Arctic world and float it down

into the tropics, the ice would all melt, and the white dreariness

would disappear, and a new splendour of colour and of light would

clothe the ground, and an unwonted vegetation would spring up where

barrenness had been. And if you and I will only float our lives

southward beneath the direct vertical rays of that great Sun of

Righteousness,' then all the dreary winter and ice of our sorrows will

melt, and joy will spring. Brother! the Christian life is a glad life,

because Christ, the infinite and incarnate Lover of our souls, looks

upon the heart that loves and trusts Him.

III. Still further, note how our Lord here sets forth His disciples'

joy as beyond the reach of violence and independent of externals.

No man taketh it from you.' Of course, that refers primarily to the

opposition and actual hostility of the persecuting world, which that

handful of frightened men were very soon to face; and our Lord assures

them here that, whatsoever the power of the devil working through the

world may be able to filch away from them, it cannot filch away the joy

that He gives. But we may extend the meaning beyond that reference.

Much of our joy, of course, depends upon our fellows, and disappears

when they fade away from our sight and we struggle along in a solitude,

made the more dreary because of remembered companionship. And much of

our joy depends upon the goodwill and help of our fellows, and they can

snatch away all that so depends. They can hedge up our road and make it

uncomfortable and sad for us in many ways, but no man but myself can

put a roof over my head to shut me out from God and Christ; and as long

as I have a clear sky overhead, it matters very little how high may be

the walls that foes or hostile circumstances pile around me, and how

close they may press upon me. And much of our joy necessarily depends

upon and fluctuates with external circumstances of a hundred different

kinds, as we all only too well know. But we do not need to have all our

joy fed from these surface springs. We may dig deeper down if we like.

If we are Christians, we have, like some beleaguered garrison in a

fortress, a well in the courtyard that nobody can get at, and which

never can run dry. Your joy no man taketh from you.'

As long as we have Christ, we cannot be desolate. If He and I were

alone in the universe, or, paradoxical as it may sound, if He and I

were alone, and the universe were not, I should have all that I needed

and my joy would be full, if I loved Him as I ought to do.

So, my brother! let us see to it that we dig deep enough for the

foundation of our blessedness, and that it is on Christ and nothing

less infinite, less eternal, less unchangeable, that we repose for the

inward blessedness which nothing outside of us can touch. That is the

blessedness which we may all possess, For I am persuaded that neither

death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things

present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other

creature, shall be able to separate us' from the eye and the heart of

the risen Christ who lives for us. But remember, though externals have

no power to rob us of our joy, they have a very formidable power to

interfere with the cultivation of that faith, which is the essential

condition of our joy. They cannot force us away from Christ, but they

may tempt us away. The sunshine did for the traveller in the old fable

what the storm could not do; and the world may cause you to think so

much about it that you forget your Master. Its joys may compel Him to

hide His face, and may so fill your eyes that you do not care to look

at His face; and so the sweet bond may be broken, and the consciousness

of a living, loving Jesus may fade, and become filmy and unsubstantial,

and occasional and interrupted. Do you see to it that what the world

cannot do by violence and directly, it does not do by its harlot kisses

and its false promises, tempting you away from the paths where alone

you can meet your Master.

IV. Lastly, note that this life of joy, which our Lord here speaks of,

is made certain by the promise of a faithful Christ.

Verily, verily, I say unto you,'--He was accustomed to use that

impressive and solemn formula, when He was about to speak words beyond

the reach of human wisdom to discover, or of prime importance for men

to accept and believe. He tells these men, who had nothing but His bare

word to rely upon, that the astonishing thing which He is going to

promise them will certainly come to pass. He would encourage them to

rest an unfaltering confidence, for the brief parenthesis of sorrow,

upon His faithful promise of joy. He puts His own character, so to

speak, in pawn. His words are precisely equivalent in meaning to the

solemn Old Testament words which are represented as being the oath of

God, As I live saith the Lord,' You may be as sure of this thing as you

are of My divine existence, for all My divine Being is pledged to you

to bring it about.' Verily, verily, I say unto you,' You may be as sure

of this thing as you are of Me, for all that I am is pledged to fulfil

the words of My lips.'

So Christ puts His whole truthfulness at stake, as it were; and if any

man who has ever loved Jesus Christ and trusted Him aright has not

found this joy unspeakable and full of glory,' then Jesus Christ has

said the thing that is not.

Then why is it that so many professing Christians have such joyless

lives as they have? Simply because they do not keep the conditions. If

we will love Him so as to set our hearts upon Him, if we will desire

Him as our chief good, if we will keep our eyes fixed upon Him, then,

as sure as He is living and is the Truth, He will flood our hearts with

blessedness, and His joy will pour into our souls as the flashing tide

rushes into some muddy and melancholy harbour, and sets everything

dancing that was lying stranded on the slime. If, my brother, you, a

professing Christian, know but little of this joy, why, then, it is

your fault, and not His. The joyless lives of so many who say that they

are His disciples cast no shadow of suspicion upon His veracity, but

they do cast a very deep shadow of doubt upon their profession of faith

in Him.

Is your religion joyful? Is your joy religious? The two questions go

together. And if we cannot answer these questions in the light of God's

eye as we ought to do, let these great promises and my text prick us

into holier living, into more consistent Christian character, and a

closer walk with our Master and Lord.

The out-and-out Christian is a joyful Christian. The half-and-half

Christian is the kind of Christian that a great many of you are--little

acquainted with the joy of the Lord.' Why should we live half way up

the hill and swathed in mists, when we might have an unclouded sky and

a visible sun over our heads, if we would only climb higher and walk in

the light of His face?

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IN THAT DAY'

And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto

you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it

you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall

receive, that your joy may be full.'--JOHN xvi. 23, 24.

Our Lord here sums up the prerogatives and privileges of His servants

in the day that was about to dawn and to last till He came again. There

is nothing absolutely new in the words; substantially the promises

contained in them have appeared in former parts of these discourses

under somewhat different aspects and connections. But our Lord brings

them together here, in this condensed repetition, in order that the

scattered rays, being thus focussed, may have more power to illuminate

with certitude, and to warm into hope. Ye shall ask Me nothing. . ..

Ask and ye shall receive. . .. Your joy shall be full.' These are the

jewels which He sets in a cluster, the juxtaposition making each

brighter, and gives to us for a parting keepsake.

Now it is to be noticed that the two askings which are spoken of here

are expressed by different words in the Greek. Our English word ask'

means two things, either to question or to request; to ask in the sense

of interrogating, in order to get information and teaching, or in the

sense of beseeching, in order to get gifts. In the former sense the

word is employed in the first clause of my text, with distinct

reference to the disciples' desire, a moment or two before, to ask Him

a very foolish question; and in the second sense it is employed in the

central portion of my text.

So, then, there are three things here as the marks of the Christian

life all through the ages: the cessation of the ignorant questions

addressed to a present Christ; the satisfaction of desires; and the

perfecting of joy. These are the characteristics of a true Christian

life. My brother, are they in any degree the characteristics of yours?

I. Note then, first, the end of questionings.

In that day ye shall ask Me nothing,' and do not you think that when

the disciples heard that, they would be tempted to say, Then what in

all the world are we to do?' To them the thought that He was not to be

at their sides any longer, for them to go to with their difficulties,

must have seemed despair rather than advance; but in Christ's eyes it

was progress. He tells them and us that we gain by losing Him, and are

better off than they were, precisely because He does not any longer

stand at our sides for us to question. It is better for a boy to puzzle

out the meaning of a Latin book by his own brains and the help of a

dictionary than it is lazily to use an interlinear translation. And,

though we do not always feel it, and are often tempted to think how

blessed it would be if we had an infallible Teacher visible here at our

sides, it is a great deal better for us that we have not, and it is a

step in advance that He has gone away. Many eager and honest Christian

souls, hungering after certainty and rest, have cast themselves in

these latter days into the arms of an infallible Church. I doubt

whether any such questioning mind has found what it sought; and I am

sure that it has taken a step downwards, in passing from the spiritual

guidance realised by our own honest industry and earnest use of the

materials supplied to us in Christ's word, to any external authority

which comes to us to save us the trouble of thinking, and to confirm to

us truth which we have not made our own by search and effort. We gain

by losing the visible Christ; and He was proclaiming progress and not

retrogression, when He said: In that day ye shall ask Me no more

questions.'

For what have we instead? We have two things: a completed revelation,

and an inward Teacher.

We have a completed revelation. Great and wonderful and unspeakably

precious as were and are the words of Jesus Christ, His deeds are far

more. The death of Christ has told us things that Christ before His

death could not tell. The resurrection of Christ has cast light upon

all the darkest places of man's destiny which Christ, before His

resurrection, could not by any words so illuminate. The ascension of

Christ has opened doors for thought, for faith, for hope, which were

fast closed, notwithstanding all His teachings, until He had burst them

asunder and passed to His throne. And the facts which are substituted

for the bodily presence of Jesus with His disciples tell us a great

deal more than they could ever have drawn from Him by questionings,

however persistent and however wisely directed. We have a completed

revelation, and therefore we need ask Him nothing.'

And we have a divine Spirit that will come to us if we will, and teach

us by means of blessing the exercise of our own faculties, and guiding

us, not, indeed, into the uniform perception of the intellectual

aspects of Christian truth, but into the apprehension and the loving

possession, as a power in our lives, of all the truth that we need to

mould our characters and to raise us to the likeness of Himself.

Only, brother! let us remember what such a method of teaching demands

from us. It needs that we honestly use the revelation that is given us;

it needs that we loyally, lovingly, trustfully, submit ourselves to the

teaching of that Spirit who will dwell in us; it needs that we bring

our lives up to the height of our present knowledge, and make

everything that we know a factor in shaping what we do and what we are.

If thus we will to do His will, we shall know of the doctrine'; if thus

we yield ourselves to the divine Spirit, we shall be taught the

practical bearings of all essential truth; and if thus we ponder the

facts and principles that are enshrined in Christ's life, and the

Apostolic commentary on them, as preserved for us in the Scripture, we

shall not need to envy those that could go to Him with their questions,

for He will come to us with His all-satisfying answers.

Ah! but you say experience does not verify these promises. Look at a

divided Christendom; look at my own difficulties of knowing what I am

to believe and to think. Well, as for a divided Christendom, saintly

souls are all of one Church, and however they may formulate the

intellectual aspects of their creed, when they come to pray, they say

the same things. Roman Catholic and Protestant, and Quaker and

Churchman, and Calvinist and Arminian, and Greek and Latin

Christians--all contribute to the hymn-book of every sect; and we all

sing their songs. So the divisions are like the surface cracks on a dry

field, and a few inches down there is continuity. As for the difficulty

of knowing what I am to believe and think about controverted questions,

no doubt there will remain many gaps in the circle of our knowledge; no

doubt there will be much left obscure and unanswered; but if we will

keep ourselves near the Master, and use honestly and diligently the

helps that He gives us--the outward help in the Word, and the inward

help in His teaching Spirit--we shall not walk in darkness,' but shall

have light enough given to be to us the Light of Life.'

Brother, keep close to Christ, and Christ--present though absent-- will

teach you.

II. Secondly, satisfied desires.

This second great promise of my text, introduced again by the solemn

affirmation, Verily, verily, I say unto you,' substantially appeared in

a former part of these discourses with a very significant difference.

Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name that will I do.' If ye shall ask

anything in My name I will do it.' There Christ presented Himself as

the Answerer of the petitions, because His more immediate purpose was

to set forth His going to the Father as His elevation to a yet loftier

position. Here, on the other hand, He sets forth the Father as the

Answerer of the petitions, because His purpose is to point away from

undue dependence on His own corporeal presence. But the fact that He

thus, as occasion requires, substitutes the one form of speech for the

other, and indifferently represents the same actions as being done by

Himself and by the Father in heaven, carries with it large teachings

which I do not dwell upon now. Only I would ask you to consider how

much is involved in that fact, that, as a matter of course, and without

explanation of the difference, our Lord alternates the two forms, and

sometimes says, I will do it,' and sometimes says, The Father will do

it.' Does it not point to that great and blessed truth, Whatsoever

thing the Father doeth, that also doeth the Son likewise?'

But passing from that, let me ask you to note very carefully the

limitation, which is here given to the broad universality of the

declaration that desires shall be satisfied. If ye shall ask anything

in My name'; there is the definition of Christian prayer. And what does

it mean? Is a prayer, which from the beginning to the end is reeking

with self-will, hallowed because we say, as a kind of charm at the end

of it, For Christ's sake. Amen'? Is that praying in Christ's name?

Surely not! What is the name' of Christ? His whole revealed character.

So these disciples could not pray in His name hitherto,' because His

character was not all revealed. Therefore, to pray in His name is to

pray, recognising what He is, as revealed in His life and death and

resurrection and ascension, and to base all our dependence of

acceptance of our prayers upon that revealed character. Is that all?

Are any kind of wishes, which are presented in dependence upon Christ

as our only Hope and Channel of divine blessing, certain to be

fulfilled? Certainly not. To pray in My name' means yet more than that.

It means not only to pray in dependence upon Christ as our only Ground

of hope and Source of acceptance and God's only Channel of blessing,

but it means exactly what the same phrase means when it is applied to

us. If I say that I am doing something in your name, that means on your

behalf, as your representative, as your organ, and to express your mind

and will. And if we pray in Christ's name, that implies, not only our

dependence upon His merit and work, but also the harmony of our wills

with His will, and that our requests are not merely the hot products of

our own selfishness, but are the calm issues of communion with Him.

Thus to pray requires the suppression of self. Heathen prayer, if there

be such a thing, is the violent effort to make God will what I wish.

Christian prayer is the submissive effort to make my wish what God

wills, and that is to pray in Christ's name.

My brother! do we construct our prayers thus? Do we try to bring our

desires into harmony with Him, before we venture to express them? Do we

go to His footstool to pour out petulant, blind, passionate,

un-sanctified wishes after questionable and contingent good, or do we

wait until He fills our spirits with longings after what it must be His

desire to give, and then breathe out those desires caught from His own

heart, and echoing His own will? Ah! The discipline that is wanted to

make men pray in Christ's name is little understood by multitudes

amongst us.

Notice how certain such prayer is of being answered. Of course, if it

is in harmony with the will of God, it is sure not to be offered in

vain. Our Revised Version makes a slight alteration in the order of the

words in the first clause of this promise by reading, If ye ask

anything of the Father He will give it you in My name.' God's gifts

come down through the same channel through which our prayer goes up. We

ask in the name of Christ, and get our answers in the name of Christ.

But, whether that be the true collocation of ideas or not, mark the

plain principle here, that only desires which are in harmony with the

divine will are sure of being satisfied. What is a bad thing for a

child cannot be a good thing for a man. What is a foolish and wicked

thing for a father down here to do cannot be a kind and a wise thing

for the Father in the heavens to do. If you wish to spoil your child

you say, What do you want, my dear? tell me and you shall have it.' And

if God were saying anything like that to us, through the lips of Jesus

Christ His Son, in the text, it would be no blessing, but a curse. He

knows a great deal better what is good for us; and so He says: Bring

your wishes into line with My purpose, and then you will get them';

Delight thyself in the Lord, and He will give thee the desires of thine

heart.' If you want God most you will be sure to get Him; if your

heart's desires are after Him, your heart's desires will be satisfied.

The young lions do roar and suffer hunger.' That is the world's way of

getting good; fighting and striving and snarling, and forcibly seeking

to grasp, and there is hunger after all. There is a better way than

that. Instead of striving and struggling to snatch and to keep a

perishable and questionable portion, let us wait upon God and quiet our

hearts, stilling them into the temper of communion and conformity with

Him, and we shall not ask in vain.

He who prays in Christ's name must pray Christ's prayer, Not My will,

but Thine be done.' And then, though many wishes may be unanswered, and

many weak petitions unfulfilled, and many desires unsatisfied, the

essential spirit of the prayer will be answered, and, His will being

done in us and on us, our wishes will acquiesce in it and desire

nothing besides. To him who can thus pray in Christ's name in the

deepest sense, and after Christ's pattern, every door in God's

treasure-house flies open, and he may take as much of the treasure as

he desires. The Master bends lovingly over such a soul, and looks him

in the eyes, and with outstretched hand says, What wilt thou that I

should do unto thee? Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'

III. Lastly, the perfect joy which follows upon these two.

That your joy may be fulfilled.' Again we have a recurrence of a

promise that has appeared in another connection in an earlier part of

this discourse; but the connection here is worthy of notice. The

promise is of joy that comes from the satisfaction of meek desires in

unison with Christ's will. Is it possible then, that, amidst all the

ups and downs, the changes and the sorrows of this fluctuating,

tempest-tossed life of ours we may have a deep and stable joy? That

your joy may be full,' says my text, or fulfilled,' like some jewelled,

golden cup charged to the very brim with rich and quickening wine, so

that there is no room for a drop more. Can it be that ever, in this

world, men shall be happy up to the very limits of their capacity? Was

anybody ever so blessed that he could not be more so? Was your cup ever

so full that there was no room for another drop in it? Jesus Christ

says that it may be so, and He tells us how it may be so. Bring your

desires into harmony with God's, and you will have none unsatisfied

amongst them; and so you will be blessed to the full; and though sorrow

comes, as of course it will come, still you may be blessed. There is no

contradiction between the presence of this deep, central joy and a

surface and circumference of sorrow. Rather we need the surrounding

sorrow, to concentrate, and so to intensify, the central joy in God.

There are some flowers which only blow in the night; and white blossoms

are visible with startling plainness in the twilight, when all the

flaunting purples and reds are hid. We do not know the depth, the

preciousness, the power of the joy of the Lord,' until we have felt it

shining in our hearts in the midst of the thick darkness of earthly

sorrow, and bringing life into the very death of our human delights. It

may be ours on the conditions that my text describes.

My dear friends! there are only two courses before us. Either we must

have a life with superficial, transitory, incomplete gladness, and an

aching centre of vacuity and pain, or we may have a life which, in its

outward aspects and superficial appearance, has much about it that is

sad and trying, but down in the heart of it is calm and joyful. Which

of the two do you deem best, a superficial gladness and a rooted

sorrow, or a superficial sorrow and a central joy? Even in laughter the

heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.' But, on

the other hand, the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion

with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy

and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'

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THE JOYS OF THAT DAY'

These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh,

when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you

plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in My Name: and I say

not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father

Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I

came out from God.'--JOHN xvi. 25-27.

The stream which we have been tracking for so long in these discourses

has now nearly reached its close. Our Lord, in these all but final

words, sums up the great salient features which He has already more

than once specified, of the time when His followers shall live with an

absent and yet present Christ. He reiterates here substantially just

what He has been saying before, but in somewhat different connection,

and with some slight expansion. And this reiteration of the glad

features of the day which was about to dawn suggests how much the

disciples needed, and how much we need, to have repeated over and over

again the blessed and profound lessons of these words.

What a sublime self-repression there was in the Master! Not one word

escapes from His lips of the personal pain and agony into which He had

to plunge and be baptized, before that day could dawn. All that was

crushed down and kept back, and He only speaks to the disciples and to

us of the joy that comes to them, and not at all of the bitter sorrow

by which it is bought. There are set forth in these words, as it seems

to me, especially three characteristics which belong to the whole

period between the ascension of Jesus Christ and His coming again for

judgment. It is a day of continual and clearer teaching by Him. It is a

day of desires in His name. It is a day of filial experience of a

Father's love. These are the characteristics of the Christian period,

and they ought to be the characteristics of our individual Christian

life. My brother! are they the characteristics of yours?

Let us note them in order.

I. First, our Lord tells us that the whole period of the Christian life

upon earth is to be a period of continuous and clearer teaching by

Himself.

Hitherto I have spoken to you in proverbs,' or parables. The word

means, not only a comparison or parable, but also, and perhaps

primarily, a mysterious and enigmatical saying. The reference is, of

course, directly to the immediately preceding thoughts, in which His

departure and the sorrow that accompanied it and was to merge into joy,

were described under that touching figure of the woman in travail. But

the reference must be extended very much farther than that. It includes

not only this discourse, but the whole of His teaching by word whilst

He was here upon earth.

Now the first thing that strikes me here is this strange fact. Here is

a man who knew Himself to be within four-and-twenty hours of His death,

and knew that scarcely another word of instruction was to come from His

lips upon earth, calmly asserting that, for all the subsequent ages of

the world's history, He is to continue its Teacher. We know how the

wisest and profoundest of earthly teachers have their lips sealed by

death, so as that no counsel can come from them any more, and their

disciples long in vain for responses from the silenced oracle, which is

dumb whatever new problems may arise. But Jesus Christ calmly poses

before the world as not having His teaching activity in the slightest

degree suspended by that fact which puts a conclusive and complete

close to all other teachers' words. Rather He says that after death He

will, more clearly than in life, be the Teacher of the world.

What does He mean by that? Well, remember first of all the facts which

followed this saying--the Cross, the Grave, Olivet, the Heavens, the

Throne. These were still in the future when He spoke. And have not

these--the bitter passion, the supernatural resurrection, the

triumphant ascension, and the everlasting session of the Son at the

right hand of God--taught the whole world the meaning of the Father's

name, and the love of the Father's heart, and the power of the Father's

Son, as nothing else, not even the sweetest and tenderest of His

utterances, could have taught them? When, then, He declares the

continuance of His teaching functions unbroken through death and beyond

it, He refers partly to the future facts of His earthly manifestation,

and still more does He refer to that continuous teaching which, by that

divine Spirit whom He sends, is granted to every believing soul all

through the ages.

This great truth, which recurs over and over again in these discourses

of our Lord, is far too much dropped out of the consciousness and

creeds of the modern Christian Church. We call ourselves Christ's

disciples. If there be disciples, there must be a Master. His teaching

is by no means merely the effect of the recorded facts and utterances

of the Lord, preserved here in the Book for us, and to be pondered upon

by ourselves, but it is also the hourly communication, to waiting

hearts and souls that keep themselves near the Lord, of deeper insight

into His will, of larger views of His purposes, of a firmer grasp of

the contents of Scripture, and a more complete subjection of the whole

nature to the truth as it is in Jesus. Christian men and women! do you

know anything about what it is to learn of Christ in the sense that He

Himself, and no poor human voice like mine, nor even merely the records

of His past words and deeds as garnered in these Gospels and expounded

by His Apostles, is the source of your growing knowledge of Him? If we

would keep our hearts and minds clearer than we do of the babble of

earthly voices, and be more loyal and humble and constant and patient

in our sitting on the benches in Christ's school till the Master

Himself came to give us His lessons, these great words of my text would

not, as they so often do in the mass of professing Christians, lack the

verification of experience and the assurance that it is so with us.

Have you sat in Christ's school, and do you know the secret and

illuminative whispers of His teaching? If not, there is something wrong

in your Christian character, and something insincere in your Christian

profession.

Notice, still further, that our Lord here ranks that subsequent

teaching before all that He said upon earth, great and precious as it

was. Now I do not mean for one moment to allege that fresh

communications of truth, uncontained in Scripture, are given to us in

the age-long and continuous teaching of Jesus Christ. That I do not

suppose to be the meaning of the great promises before us, for the

facts of revelation were finished when He ascended, and the inspired

commentary upon the facts of revelation was completed with these

writings which follow the Gospels in our New Testament. But Christ's

teaching brings us up to the understanding of the facts and of the

commentary upon them which Scripture contains, so that what was parable

or proverb, dimly apprehended, mysterious and enigmatical when it was

spoken, and what remains mysterious and enigmatical to us until we grow

up to it, gradually becomes full of significance and weighty with a

plain and certain meaning. This is the teaching which goes on through

the ages--the lifting of His children to the level of apprehending more

and more of the inexhaustible and manifold wisdom which is stored for

us in this Book. The mine has been worked on the surface, but the

deeper it goes the richer is the lode; and no ages will exhaust the

treasures that are hid in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He uses the new problems, the new difficulties, the new circumstances

of each successive age, and of each individual Christian, in order to

evolve from His word larger lessons, and to make the earlier lessons

more fully and deeply understood. And this generation, with all its new

problems, with all its uneasiness about social questions, with all its

new attitude to many ancient truths, will find that Jesus Christ is, as

He has been to all past generations,--the answer to all its doubts,

using even these doubts as a means of evolving the deeper harmonies of

His Word, and of unveiling in the ancient truth more than former

generations have seen in it. Brethren, I write unto you no new

commandment. Again, a new commandment I write unto you.' The

inexhaustible freshness of the old word taught us anew, with deeper

significance and larger applications, by the everlasting Teacher of the

Church, is the hope that shines through these words. I commend to you,

dear brethren, the one simple, personal question, Have I submitted

myself to that Teacher, and said to men and systems and preachers and

books and magazines, and all the rest of the noisy and clamorous

tongues that bewilder under pretence of enlightening this

generation--have I said to them all, Hold your peace! and let me, in

the silence of my waiting soul, hear the Teacher Himself speak to me.

Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth. Teach me Thy way and lead me, for

Thou art my Master, and I the humblest of Thy scholars'?

II. In the next place, another of the glad features of this dawning day

is that it is to be a day of desires based upon Christ, and Christlike.

In that day ye shall ask in My name.' Our translators have wisely put a

colon at the end of that clause, in order that we may not hurry over it

too quickly in haste to get to the next one. For there is a substantial

blessing and privilege wrapped up in it. Our Lord has just been saying

the same thing in the previous verses, but He repeats it here in order

to emphasise it, and to set it by the subsequent words in a somewhat

different light. But I dwell upon it for a very simple, practical

purpose. I have already explained in former sermons the full, deep

meaning of that phrase, asking in Christ's name,' and have suggested to

you that it implies two things--the one, that our desires should all be

based upon His great work as the only ground of our acceptance with

God; and the other, that our desires should all be such as represent

His heart and His mind. When we ask in His name' we ask, first, for His

sake, and, second, as in His person. And such desires, resting their

hopes of answer solely upon His mighty sacrifice and all-sufficient

merit, and shaped accurately and fully after the pattern of the wishes

that are dear to His heart, are to be the prerogative and the joy of

His servants, in the new day' that is about to dawn.

Note how beautifully this thought, of wishes moulded into conformity

with Jesus Christ, and offered in reliance upon His great sacrifice,

follows upon that other thought, I will tell you plainly of the

Father.' The Master's voice speaks, revealing the paternal heart, the

scholar's voice answers with desires kindled by the revelation.

Longings and aspirations humbly offered for His sake, and after the

pattern of His own, are our true response to His teaching voice. As the

astronomer, the more powerful his telescope, though it may resolve some

of the nebulae that resisted feebler instruments, only has his bounds

of vision enlarged as he looks through it, and sees yet other and

mightier star-clouds lying mysterious beyond its ken--so each new

influx and tidal wave of knowledge of the Father, which Christ gives to

His waiting child, leads on to enlarged desires, to longings to press

still further into the unexplored mysteries of that magnificent and

boundless land, and to nestle still closer into the infinite heart of

God. He declares to us the Father, and the answer of the child to the

declaration of the Father is the cry, Abba! Father! show me yet more of

Thy heart.' Thus aspiration and fruition, longing and satisfaction in

unsatiated and inexhaustible and unwearying alternation, are the two

blessed poles between which the life of a Christian may revolve in

smoothness and music.

My friend! is that anything like the transcript of our experience, that

the more we know of God, the more we long to know of, and to possess,

Him? and the more we long to know of, and to possess, Him, the more

full, gracious, confidential, tender, and continuous are the teachings

of our Master? Is not this a far higher level of Christian life than

that we live upon? And why so? Is Christ's word faithless? Hath He

forgotten to be gracious? Was this promise of His idle wind? Or is it

that you and I have never grasped the fulness of privileges that He

bestows upon us?

III. Note, lastly, that that day is to be a day of filial experience of

a Father's love.

I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father

Himself loveth you because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I

came out from God.' Jesus Christ does not deny His intercession. He

simply does not bring it into evidence here. To deny it would have been

impossible, for soon afterwards we find Him saying, I pray for them

which Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine.' But He does not

emphasise it here, in order that He may emphasise another blessed

source of solace--viz., that to those who listen to the Master's

teaching, and have their desires moulded into harmony with His, and

their wishes and hopes all based upon His sacrifice and work, the

divine Father's love directly flows. There is no need of any

intercession to turn Him to be merciful. Men sometimes caricature the

thought of the intercession of Christ, as if it meant that He, by His

prayer, bent the reluctant will of the Father in heaven. All such

horrible misconceptions Christ sweeps out of the field here, even

whilst there remains, in the fact that the prayers of which He is

speaking are offered in His name, the substance and reality of all that

we mean by the intercession of Jesus Christ.

And now note that God loves the men who love Jesus Christ. So

completely does the Father identify Himself with the Son, that love to

Christ is love to Him, and brings the blessed answer of His love to us.

Whosoever loves Christ loves God.

Whosoever loves Christ must do so, believing that He came forth from

God.' There are the two characteristics of a Christian disciple,--faith

in the divine mission of the Son, and love that flows from faith. Now,

of course, it does not follow from the words before us, that this

divine love which comes down upon the heart which loves Christ is the

original and first flow of that love towards that heart. We love Him

because He first loved us.' Christ is not here tracking the stream to

its source, but is pointing to it midway in its flow. If you want to go

up to the fountain-head you have to go up to the divine Father's heart,

who loved when there was no love in us; and, because He loved, sent the

Son. First comes the unmotived, spontaneous, self-originated,

undeserved, infinite love of God to sinners and aliens and enemies;

then the Cross and the mission of Jesus Christ; then the faith in His

divine mission; then the love which is the child of faith, as it grasps

the Cross and recognises the love that lies behind it; and then, after

that, the special, tender, and paternal love of God falling upon the

hearts that love Him in His Son. There is nothing here in the slightest

degree to conflict with the grand universal truth that God loves

enemies and sinners and aliens. But there is the truth, as precious as

the other, that they who have known and believed the love that God hath

to us' live under the selectest influences of His loving heart, and

have a place in its tenderness which it is impossible that any should

have who do not so love. And that sweet commerce of a divine love

answering a human, which itself is the answer to a prior divine love,

brings with it the firm confidence that prayers in His name shall not

be prayers in vain.

So, dear friends, growing knowledge, an ever-present Teacher, the peace

of calm desires built upon Christ's Cross and fashioned after Christ's

Spirit, and the assurance in my quiet and filial heart that my Father

in the heavens loves me, and will neither give me serpents' when I ask

for them, thinking them to be fishes,' nor refuse bread' when I ask for

it--these things ought to mark the lives of all professing Christians.

Are they our experience? If not, why are they not, but because we do

not believe that Thou art come forth from God,' nor love Thee as we

ought?

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FROM' AND TO'

I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I

leave the world, and go to the Father.'--JOHN xvi. 28.

These majestic and strange words are the proper close of our Lord's

discourse, what follows being rather a reply to the disciples'

exclamation. There is nothing absolutely new in them, but what is new

is the completeness and the brevity with which they cover the whole

ground of His being, work, and glory. They fall into two halves, each

consisting of two clauses; the former half describing our Lord's

descent, the latter His ascent. In each half the two clauses deal with

the same fact, considered from the two opposite ends as it were--the

point of departure and the point of arrival. I came forth from the

Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world and go to

the Father.' But the first point of departure is the last point of

arrival, and the end comes round to the beginning. Our Lord's earthly

life is, as it were, a jewel enclosed within the flashing gold of His

eternal dwelling with God.

So I think we shall best apprehend the scope, and appropriate to

ourselves the blessing and power of these words, if we deal with the

four points to which they call our attention--the dwelling with the

Father; the voluntary coming to the earth; the voluntary departure from

the earth; and, once more, the dwelling with the Father. We must grasp

them all if we would know the whole Christ and all that He is able to

do and to be to us and to the world. So, then, I deal simply with these

four points.

I. Note then, first, the dwelling with the Father.

If we adopt the most probable reading of the first clause of my text,

it is even more forcible than in our version: I came forth out of the

Father.' Such an egress implies a being in the Father in a sense

ineffable for our words, and transcending our thoughts. It implies a

far deeper and closer relation than even that of juxtaposition,

companionship, or outward presence.

Now, in these great words there is involved obviously, to begin with,

that, during His earthly life, our Lord bore about with Him the

remembrance and consciousness of an individual existence prior to His

life on earth. I need not remind you how frequently such hints drop

from His lips--Before Abraham was, I am,' and the like. But beyond that

solemn thought of a remembered previous existence there is this other

one--that the words are the assertion by Christ Himself of a previous,

deep, mysterious, ineffable union with the Father. On such a subject

wisdom and reverence bid us speak only as we hear; but I cannot refrain

from emphasising the fact that, if this fourth Gospel be a genuine

record of the teaching of Jesus Christ--and, if it is not, what genius

was he who wrote it?--if it be a genuine record of the teaching of

Jesus Christ, then nothing is more plain than that over and over again,

in all sorts of ways, by implication and by direct statement, to all

sorts of audiences, friends and foes, He reiterated this tremendous

claim to have dwelt in the bosom of the Father,' long before He lay on

the breast of Mary. What did He mean when He said, No man hath ascended

up into heaven save He which came down from heaven'? What did He mean

when He said, What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where

He was before'? What did He mean when He said, I came down from heaven,

not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me'? And what

did He mean when, in the midst of the solemnities of that last prayer,

He said, Glorify Thou Me with the glory which I had with Thee before

the world was'?

Dear friends! it seems to me that if we know anything about Jesus

Christ, we know that. If we cannot believe that He thus spoke, we know

nothing about Him on which we can rely. And so, without venturing to

enlarge at all upon these solemn words, I leave this with you as a

plain fact, that the meekest, lowliest, and most sane and wise of

religious teachers made deliberately over and over again this claim,

which is either absolutely true, and lifts Him into the region of the

Deity, or else is fatal to His pretensions to be either meek or modest,

or wise or sane, or a religious teacher to whom it is worth our while

to listen.

II. Note, secondly, the voluntary coming into the world.

I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world.' We all talk

in a loose way about men coming into the world when they are born; but

the weight of these words and the solemnity of the occasion on which

they were spoken, and the purpose for which they were spoken--viz., to

comfort and to illuminate these disciples--forbid us to see such a mere

platitude as that in them. There would have been no consolation in them

unless they meant something a great deal more than the undeniable fact

that Jesus Christ was born, and the melancholy fact that Jesus Christ

was about to die.

I am come into the world.' There has been a Man who chose to be born.

There has been a Man who appeared here, not of the will of the flesh,

nor of the will of man,' but by His own free choice. He willed to take

upon Him the form of humanity. Now the voluntariness of the entrance of

Jesus Christ into the conditions of our human life is all-important for

us, for it underlies the whole value of that life and its whole power

to be blessing and good to us. It underlies, for instance, the personal

sinlessness of Jesus Christ, and hence His power to bring a new

beginning of pure and perfect life into the midst of humanity. All the

rest of mankind, knit together by that mysterious bond of natural

descent which only now for the first time is beginning to receive its

due attention on the part of men of science, by heredity have the taint

upon them. And if Jesus Christ is only one of the series, then there is

no deliverance in Him, for there is no sinlessness in that life.

However fair its record may seem on the surface, there is beneath,

somewhere or other, the leprosy that infects us all. Unless He came in

another fashion from all the rest of us, He came with the same sin as

all the rest of us, and He is no deliverer from sin. Rather He is one

of the series who, like the melancholy captives on the road to Siberia,

each carries a link of the hopeless chain that binds them all together.

But, if it be true that of His own will He took to Himself humanity,

and was born as the Scripture tells us He was born, His birth being His

coming' and not His being brought, then, being free from taint, He can

deliver us from taint, and, Himself unbound by the chain, He can break

it from off our necks. The stream is fouled from its source downwards,

and flows on, every successive drop participant of the primeval

pollution. But, down from the white snows of the eternal hills of God,

there comes into it an affluent which has no stain on its pure waters,

and so can purge that into which it enters. Jesus Christ willed to be

born, and to plant a new beginning of holy life in the very heart of

humanity which henceforth should work as leaven.

Let me remind you, too, that this voluntary assumption of our nature is

all-important to us, for unless we preserve it clear to our minds and

hearts, the power to sway our affections is struck away from Jesus

Christ. Unless He voluntarily took upon Himself the nature which He

meant to redeem, why should I be thankful to Him for what He did, and

what right has He to claim my love? But if He willingly came down

amongst us, and to this end was born, and for this cause,' of His own

loving heart, came into the world,' then I am knit to Him by cords that

cannot be broken. One thing only saves for Jesus Christ the unbounded

and perpetual love of mankind, and that is, that from His own infinite

and perpetual love He came into the world. We talk about kings leaving

their palaces and putting on the rags of the beggar, and learning love

in huts where poor men lie,' and making experience of the conditions of

their lowliest subjects. But here is a fact, infinitely beyond all

these legends. It is set forth for us in a touching fashion, in the

incident that almost immediately preceded these parting words of our

Lord, when Jesus, knowing that He came forth from God, laid aside His

garments and took a towel, and girded Himself,' and washed the foul

feet of these travel-stained men. That was a parable of the

Incarnation. The consciousness of His divine origin was ever with Him,

and that consciousness led Him to lay aside the garments of His

majesty, and to gird Himself with the towel of service. That He had a

body round which to wrap it was more humiliation than that He wrapped

it round the body which He took. And we may learn there what it is that

gives Him His supreme right to our devotion and our surrender--viz.,

that, being in the form of God, He thought not equality with God a

thing to be covetously retained, but made Himself of no reputation, and

was found in fashion as a Man.'

III. Note the voluntary leaving the world.

The stages of that departure are not distinguished. They are threefold

in fact--the death, the resurrection, the ascension, and in all three

we have the majestic, spontaneous energy of Christ as their cause.

There was a voluntary death, I have so often had occasion to insist

upon that, in the course of these sermons, that I do not need to dwell

upon it now. Let me remind you only how distinctly and in what various

forms that thought is presented to us in the Scriptures. We have our

Lord's own words about His having power to lay down His life.' We have

in the story of the Passion hints that seem to suggest that His

relation to death, to which He is about to bow His head, was altogether

different from that of ours. For instance, we read: Into Thy hands I

commend My Spirit'; and He gave up the Spirit.' We have hints of a

similar nature in the very swiftness of His death and unexpected

brevity of His suffering, to be accounted for by no natural result of

the physical process of crucifixion. The fact is that Jesus Christ is

the Lord of death, and was so even when He seemed to be its Servant,

and that He never showed Himself more completely the Prince of Life and

the Conqueror of Death than when He gave up His life and died, not

because He must, but because He would. There is a scene in a modern

book of fiction of a man sitting on a rock and the ocean stretching

round him. It reaches high upon his breast, but it threatens not his

life, till he, sitting there in his calm, bows his head beneath the

wave and lets it roll over him. So Christ willed to die, and died

because He willed.

There was also a voluntary resurrection by His own power; for although

Scripture sometimes represents His rising again from the dead as being

the Father's attestation of the Son's finished work, it also represents

it as being, in accordance with His own claim of power to lay down My

life, and to take it again,' the Son's triumphant egress from the

prison into which, for the moment, He willed to pass. Jesus was raised

from the dead by the glory of the Father,' but also Jesus rose from the

dead by His own power.

There was also a voluntary ascension to the heavens. There was no need

for Elijah's chariot of fire. There was no need for a whirlwind to

sweep a mortal to the sky. There was no need for any external vehicle

or agency whatsoever. No angels bore Him up upon their wings. But, the

cords of duty which bound Him to earth being cut, He rose to His own

native sphere; and, if one might so say, the natural forces of His

supernatural life bore Him, by inverted gravitation, upward to the

place which was His own. He ascended by His own inherent power.

Thus, by a voluntary death, He became the Sacrifice for our sins; by

the might of His self-effected resurrection He proclaimed Himself the

Lord of death and the resurrection for all that trust Him; and by

ascending up on high He draws our hearts' desires after Him, so that

we, too, as we see Him lost from our sight, behind the bright Shekinah

cloud that stooped to conceal the last stages of His ascension from our

view, may return to our lowly work with great joy,' and set our

affection on things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand

of God.'

IV. So, lastly, we have here the dwelling again with the Father.

But that final dwelling with God is not wholly identical with the

initial one. The earthly life was no mere parenthesis, and He who

returned to the Throne carried with Him the manhood which He had

assumed, and bore it thither into the glory in which the Word had dwelt

from the beginning. And this is the true consolation which Christ

offered to these His weeping servants, and which He still offers to us

His waiting children, that now the manhood of Jesus Christ is exalted

to participation in the divine glory, and dwells there in the calm,

invisible sweetness and solemnity of fellowship with the Father.

If that be so, it is no mere abstract dogma of theology, but it touches

our daily life at all points, and is essential to the fullness of our

satisfaction and our rest in Christ.

We see not all things put under Him, but we see Jesus.' Our Brother is

elevated to the Throne, and, if I might so say, He makes the fortunes

of the family, and none of them will be poor as long as He is so rich.

He sends us from the far-off land where He is gone precious gifts of

its produce, and He will send for us to share His throne one day.

Christ's ascension to the Father is the elevation of our best and

dearest Friend to the Throne of the Universe, and the hands that were

pierced for us on the Cross hold the helm and sway the sceptre of

Creation, and therefore we may calmly meet all events.

The elevation of Jesus Christ to the Throne fills Heaven for our faith,

our imagination, and our hearts. How different it is to look up into

those awful abysses, and to wonder where, amidst their crushing

infinitude, the spirits of dear ones that are gone are wandering, if

they are at all; and to look up and to think My Christ hath passed

through the Heavens,' and is somewhere with a true Body, and with Him

all that loved Him. Without an ascended Christ we recoil from the cold

splendours of an unknown Heaven, as a rustic might from the

unintelligible magnificence of a palace. But if we believe that He is

at the right hand of God,' then the far-off becomes near, and the vague

becomes definite, and the unsubstantial becomes solid, and what was a

fear becomes a joy, and we can trust ourselves and the dear dead in His

hands, knowing that where He is they are, and that in Him they and we

have all that we need.

So, dear friends! it all comes to this--make sure that you have hold of

the whole Christ for yourselves. His earthly life is little without the

celestial halo that rings it round. His life is nothing without His

death. His death without His resurrection and ascension maybe a little

more pathetic than millions of other deaths, but is nothing, really, to

us. And the life and death and resurrection are not apprehended in

their fullest power until they are set between the eternal glory before

and the eternal glory after.

These four facts--the dwelling in the Father; the voluntary coming to

earth; the voluntary leaving earth; and, again, the dwelling with the

Father--are the walls of the strong fortress into which we may flee and

be safe. With them it stands four square to every wind that blows.'

Strike away one of them, and it totters into ruin. Make the whole

Christ your Christ; for nothing less than the whole Christ, conceived

of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, . . . crucified, dead, and

buried, . . . ascended into Heaven, and sitting at the right hand of

God,' is strong enough to help your infirmities, vast enough to satisfy

your desires, loving enough to love you as you need, or able to deliver

you from your sins, and to lift you to the glories of His own Throne.

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GLAD CONFESSION AND SAD WARNING

His disciples said unto Jesus, Lo! now speakest Thou plainly, and

speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that Thou knowest all things, and

needest not that any man should ask Thee: by this we believe that Thou

earnest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold,

the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every

man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone,

because the Father is with Me.'--JOHN xvi. 29-32.

The first words of these wonderful discourses were, Let not your heart

be troubled.' They struck the key-note of the whole. The aim of all was

to bring peace and confidence unto the disciples' spirits. And this

joyful burst of confession which wells up so spontaneously and

irrepressibly from their hearts, shows that the aim has been reached.

For a moment sorrow, bewilderment, dullness of apprehension, had all

passed away, and the foolish questioners and non-receptive listeners

had been lifted into a higher region, and possessed insight, courage,

confidence. The last sublime utterance of our Lord had gathered all the

scattered rays into a beam so bright that the blindest could not but

see, and the coldest could not but be warmed.

But yet the calm, clear eye of Christ sees something not wholly

satisfactory in this outpouring of the disciples' confidence. He does

not reject their imperfect faith, but He warns them, as if seeing the

impending hour of denial which was so terribly to contradict the

rapture of that moment. And then, with most pathetic suddenness, He

passes from them to Himself; and in a singularly blended utterance lets

us get a glimpse into His deep solitude and the companions that shared

it.

My words now make no attempt at anything more than is involved in

following the course of thought in the words before us.

I. Note the disciples' joyful confession.

Their words are permeated throughout with allusions to the previous

promises and sayings of our Lord, and the very allusions show how

shallow was their understanding of what they thought so plain. He had

said to them that, in that coming day which was so near its dawn, He

would speak to them no more in proverbs, but show them plainly of the

Father'; and they answer, with a kind of rapture of astonishment, that

the promised day has come already, and that even now He is speaking to

them plainly,' and without mysterious sayings. Did they understand His

words when they thought them so plain? I came forth from the Father,

and am come into the world? Again I leave the world and go unto the

Father,' that summary statement of the central mysteries of

Christianity, which the generations have found to be inexhaustible, and

which to so many minds has been absolutely incredible, seemed to the

shallow apprehension of these disciples to be sun-clear. If they had

understood what He meant, could they have spoken thus, or have left Him

so soon?

They begin with what they believed to be a fact, His clear utterance.

Then follows a conviction which has allusion to His previous words.

Now', say they, we know that Thou knowest all things, and needest not

that any man should ask Thee.' He had said to them, In that day ye

shall ask Me nothing'; and from the fact that he had interpreted their

unspoken words, and had anticipated their desire to ask what they durst

not ask, they draw, and rightly draw, the conclusion of His divine

Omniscience. They think that therein, in His answer to their question

before it is asked, is the fulfilment of that great promise. Was that

all that He meant? Certainly not. Did He merely mean to say, You will

ask Me nothing, because I shall know what you want to know, without

your asking'? No! But He meant, Ye shall ask Me nothing, because in

that day you will have with you an illuminating Spirit who will solve

all your difficulties.' So, again, a shallow interpretation empties the

words which they accept of their deepest and most precious meaning.

And then they take yet a further step. First, they begin with a fact;

then from that they infer a conviction; and now, upon the basis of the

inferred conviction, they rear a faith, We believe that Thou camest

forth from God.' But what they meant by coming forth from God' fell far

short of the greatness of what He meant by the declaration, and they

stand, in this final, articulate confession of their faith, but a

little in advance of Nicodemus the Rabbi, and behind Peter the Apostle

when he said: Thou art the Son of the living God.'

So their confession is a strangely mingled warp and woof of insight and

of ignorance. And they may stand for us both as examples to teach us

what we ought to be, and as beacons teaching us what we should not be.

Let me note just one or two lessons drawn from the disciples' demeanour

and confession.

The first remark that I would make is that here we learn what it is

that gives life to a creed--experience. These men had, over and over

again, in our Lord's earlier utterances, heard the declaration that He

came forth from God'; and in a sort of fashion they believed it. But,

as so many of our convictions do, it lay dormant and half dead in their

souls. But now, rightly or wrongly, experience had brought them into

contact, as they thought, with a manifest proof of His divine

Omniscience, and the torpid conviction flashed all up at once into

vitality. The smouldering fire of a mere piece of abstract belief was

kindled at once into a glow that shed warmth through their whole

hearts; and although they had professed to believe long ago that He

came from God, now, for the first time, they grasp it as a living

reality. Why? Because experience had taught it to them. It is the only

teacher that teaches us the articles of our creed in a way worth

learning them. Every one of us carries professed beliefs, which lie

there inoperative, bedridden, in the hospital and dormitory of our

souls, until some great necessity or sudden circumstance comes that

flings a beam of light upon them, and then they start and waken. We do

not know the use of the sword until we are in battle. Until the

shipwreck comes, no man puts on the lifebelt in his cabin. Every one of

as has large tracts of Christian truth which we think we most surely

believe, but which need experience to quicken them, and need us to grow

up into the possession of them. Of all our teachers who turn beliefs

assented to into beliefs really believed none is so mighty as Sorrow;

for that makes a man lay a firm hold on the deep things of God's Word.

Then another lesson that I draw from this glad confession is--the bold

avowal that always accompanies certitude. These men's stammering

tongues are loosed. They have a fact to base themselves upon. They have

a piece of assured knowledge inferred from the fact. They have a faith

built upon the certitude of what they know. Having this, out it all

comes in a gush. No man that believes with all his heart can help

speaking. You silent Christians are so, because you do not more than

half grasp the truth that you say you hold. Thy word, when shut up in

my bones, was like a fire'; and it ate its way through all the dead

matter that enclosed it, until at last it flamed out heaven high. Can

you say, We know and we believe,' with unfaltering confidence? Not we

argue'; not we humbly venture to think that on the whole'; not we are

inclined rather to believe'; but we know--that Thou knowest all things,

and that Thou hast come from God.' Seek for that blessed certitude of

knowledge, based upon the facts of individual experience, which makes

the tongue of the dumb sing,' and changes all the deadness of an

outward profession of Christianity into a living, rejoicing power.

Then, further, I draw this lesson. Take care of indolently supposing

that you understand the depths of God's truth. These Apostles fancied

that they had grasped the whole meaning of the Master's words, and were

glad in them. They fed on them, and got something out of them; but how

far they were from the true perception of their meaning! This

generation abhors mystery, and demands that the deepest truths of the

highest subject, which is religion, shall be so broken down into

mincemeat that the man in the street' can understand them in the

intervals of reading the newspaper. There are only too many of us who

are disposed to grasp at the most superficial interpretation of

Christian truth, and lazily to rest ourselves in that. A creed which

has no depth in it is like a picture which has no distance. It is flat

and unnatural, and self-condemned by the very fact. It is better that

we should feel that the smallest word that comes from God is like some

little leaf of a water plant on the surface of a pond; if you lift that

you draw a whole trail after it, and nobody knows how far off and how

deep down are the roots. It is better that we should feel how Infinity

and Eternity press in upon us on all sides, and should take as ours the

temper that recognises that till the end we are but learners, seeing in

a glass, in a riddle,' and therefore patiently waiting for light and

strenuously striving to stretch our souls to the width of the infinite

truth of God.

II. So, then, look, in the second place, at the sad questions and

forebodings of the Master.

Do ye now believe?' That does not cast doubt on the reality of their

faith so much as on its permanence and power. Behold the hour cometh

that ye shall be scattered'--as He had told them a little while before

in the upper room, like a flock when the shepherd is stricken

down--every man to his own.' He does not reject their imperfect homage,

though He discerns so clearly its imperfection and its transiency, but

sadly warns them to beware of the fleeting nature of their present

emotion; and would seek to prepare them, by the knowledge, for the

terrible storm that is going to break upon them.

So let us learn two or three simple lessons. One is that the dear Lord

accepts imperfect surrender, ignorant faith and love, of which He knows

that it will soon turn to denial. Oh! if He did not, what would become

of us all? We reject half hearts; we will not have a friendship on

which we cannot rely. The sweetness of vows is all sucked out of them

to our apprehension, if we have reason to believe that they will be

falsified in an hour. But the patient Master was willing to put up with

what you and I will not put up with; and to accept what we reject; and

be pleased that they gave Him even that. His charity suffereth long,

and is kind.' Let us not be afraid to bring even imperfect

consecration--

A little faith all undisproved'--

to His merciful feet.

Then another lesson is the need for Christian men sedulously to search

and make sure that their inward life corresponds with their words and

professions. I wonder how many thousands of people will stand up this

day and say, I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ

His only Son,' whose words would stick in their throats if that

question of the Master's was put to them, Do ye now believe?' And I

wonder how many of us are the fools of our own verbal acknowledgments

of Christ. Self-examination is not altogether a wholesome exercise, and

it may easily be carried too far, to the destruction of the spontaneity

and the gladness of the Christian life. A man may set his pulse going

irregularly by simply concentrating his attention upon it, and there

may be self-examination of the wrong sort, which does harm rather than

good. But, on the other hand, we all need to verify our position, lest

our outward life should fatally slip away from correspondence with our

inward. Our words and acts of Christian profession and service are like

bank notes. What will be the end if there is a whole ream of such going

up and down the world, and no balance of bullion in the cellars to meet

them? Nothing but bankruptcy. Do you see to it that your reserve of

gold, deep down in your hearts, always leaves a margin beyond the notes

in circulation issued by you. And in the midst of your professions hear

the Master saying, Do ye now believe?'

Another lesson that I draw is, trust no emotions, no religious

experiences, but only Him to whom they turn.

These men were perfectly sincere, and there was a glow of gladness in

their hearts, and a real though imperfect faith when they spoke. In an

hours time where were they?

We often deal far too hard measure to these poor disciples, in our

estimate of their conduct at that critical moment. We talk about them

as cowards. Well, they were better and they were worse than cowards;

for their courage failed second, but their faith had failed first. The

Cross made them dastards because it destroyed their confidence in Jesus

Christ.

We trusted.' Ah! what a world of sorrow there is in those two final

letters of that word! We trusted that it had been He who should have

redeemed Israel.' But they do not trust it any more, and so why should

they put themselves in peril for One on whom their faith can no longer

build?

Would we have been any better if we had been there? Suppose you had

stood afar off and seen Jesus die on the cross, would your faith have

lived? Do we not know what it is to be a great deal more exuberant in

our professions of faith--and real faith it is, no doubt--in some quiet

hour when we are with Him by ourselves, than when swords are flashing

and we are in the presence of His antagonists? Do we not know what it

is to grasp conviction at one moment, and the next to find it gone like

a handful of mist from our clutch? Is our Christian life always lived

upon one high uniform level? Have we no experience of hours of

exhaustion coming after deep religious emotion? Let him that is without

sin among you cast the first stone'; there will not be many stones

flung if that law be applied. Let us all, recognising our own weakness,

trust to nothing, either in our convictions or our emotions, but only

to Him, and cry, Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe!'

III. Lastly, note the lonely Christ and His companion.

Ye shall leave Me alone'; there is sadness, though it be calm, in that

clause, and then, I suppose, there was a moment's pause before the

quiet voice began again: And yet I am not alone, for the Father is with

Me.' There are two currents there, both calm; but the one bright and

the other dark.

Jesus was the loneliest man that ever lived. All other forms of human

solitude were concentrated in His. He knew the pain of unappreciated

aims, unaccepted love, unbelieved teachings, a heart thrown back upon

itself. No man understood Him, no man knew Him, no man deeply and

thoroughly loved Him or sympathised with Him, and He dwelt apart. He

felt the pain of solitude more sharply than sinful men do. Perfect

purity is keenly susceptible; a heart fully charged with love is

wounded sore when the love is thrown back, and all the more sorely the

more unselfish it is.

Solitude was no small part of the pain of Christ's passion. Remember

the pitiful appeal in Gethsemane, Tarry ye here and watch with Me!'

Remember the threefold vain return to the sleepers in the hope of

finding some sympathy from them. Remember the emphasis with which, more

than once in His life, He foretold the loneliness of His death. And

then let us understand how the bitterness of the cup that He drank had

for not the least bitter of its ingredients the sense that He drank it

alone.

Now, dear friends! some of us, no doubt, have to live outwardly

solitary lives. We all of us live alone after all fellowship and

communion. Physicists tell us that in the most solid bodies the atoms

do not touch. Hearts come closer than atoms, but yet, after all, we die

alone, and in the depths of our souls we all live alone. So let us be

thankful that the Master knows the bitterness of solitude, and has

Himself trod that path.

Then we have here the calm consciousness of unbroken communion. Jesus

Christ's sense of union with the Father was deep, close, constant, in

manner and measure altogether transcending any experience of ours. But

still He sets before us a pattern of what we should aim at in these

great words. They show the path of comfort for every lonely heart. I am

not alone, for the Father is with Me.' If earth be dark, let us look to

Heaven. If the world with its millions seems to have no friend in it

for us, let us turn to Him who never leaves us. If dear ones are torn

from our grasp, let us grasp God. Solitude is bitter; but, like other

bitters, it is a tonic. It is not all loss if the trees which with

their leafy beauty shut out the sky from us are felled, and so we see

the blue.

Christ's company is to us what the Father's fellowship was to Christ.

He has borne solitude that He might be the companion of all the lonely,

and the same voice which said, Ye shall leave Me alone,' said also, I

am with you always, even to the end of the world.'

But that communion of Christ with the Father was broken, in that awful

hour when He cried: My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' We tread there

on the verge of mysteries, beyond our comprehension; but this we

know--that it was our sin and the world's, made His by His willing

identifying of Himself with us, which built up that black wall of

separation. That hour of utter desolation, forsaken by God, deserted by

men, was the hour of the world's redemption. And Jesus Christ was

forsaken by God and deserted by men, that you and I might never be

either the one or the other, but might find in His sweet and constant

companionship at once the society of man and the presence of God.

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PEACE AND VICTORY

These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In

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

overcome the world.'--JOHN xvi. 33.

So end these wonderful discourses, and so ends our Lord's teaching

before His passion. He gathers up in one mighty word the total

intention of these sweet and deep sayings which we have so long been

pondering together. He sketches in broad outline the continual

characteristics of the disciples' life, and closes all with the

strangest shout of victory, even at the moment when He seems most

utterly defeated.

We shall, I think, best lay on our hearts and minds the spirit and

purpose of these words if we simply follow their course, and look at

the three things which Christ emphasises here: the inward peace which

is His purpose for us; the outward tribulation which is our certain

fate; and the courageous confidence which Christ's victory for us

gives.

I. Note, then, first, the inward peace.

These things have I spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace.'

Peace is not lethargy; and it is very remarkable to notice how, in

immediate connection with this great promise, there occur words which

suggest its opposite--tribulation and battle. In the world ye have

tribulation.' I have overcome'--that means a fight. These are to go

side by side with the peace that He promises. The two conditions belong

to two different spheres. The Christian life bifurcates, as it were,

into a double root, and moves in two realms--in Me' and in the world'

And the predicates and characteristics of these two lives are, in a

large measure, diametrically opposite. So here, without any

contradiction, our Lord brackets together these two opposite conditions

as both pertaining to the life of a devout soul. He promises a peace

which co-exists with tribulation and disturbance, a peace which is

realised in and through conflict and struggle. The tree will stand,

with its deep roots and its firm bole, unmoved, though wildest winds

may toss its branches and scatter its leaves. In the fortress,

beleaguered by the sternest foes, there may be, right in the very

centre of the citadel, a quiet oratory through whose thick walls the

noise of battle and the shout of victory or defeat can never penetrate.

So we may live in a centre of rest, however wild may be the uproar in

the circumference. In Me. . . peace,' that is the innermost life. In

the world. . . tribulation,' that is only the surface.

But, then, note that this peace, which exists with, and is realised

through, tribulation and strife, depends upon certain conditions. Our

Lord does not say, Ye have peace,' but These things I have spoken that

you may have it.' It is a possibility; and He lays down distinctly and

plainly here the twofold set of conditions, in fulfilment of which a

Christian disciple may dwell secure and still, in the midst of all

confusion. Note, then, these two.

It is peace, if we have it at all, in Him. Now you remember how

emphatically and loftily, as one of the very key-notes of these

discourses, our Lord has spoken to us, in them, of dwelling in Him' as

the prerogative and the duty of every Christian. We are in Him as in an

atmosphere. In Him our true lives are rooted as a tree in the soil. We

are in Him as a branch in the vine, in Him as the members in a body, in

Him as the residents in a house. We are in Him by simple faith, by the

trust that rests all upon Him, by the love that finds all in Him, by

the obedience that does all for Him. And it is only when we are in

Christ' that we rest, and realise peace. All else brings distraction.

Even delights trouble. The world may give excitement, the world may

give vulgar and fleeting joys, the world may give stimulus to much that

is good and true in us, but there is only one thing that gives peace,

and that is that our hearts should dwell in the Fortress, and should

ever be surrounded by Jesus Christ. Brother! let nothing tempt us down

from the heights, and out from the citadel where alone we are at rest;

but in the midst of all the pressing duties, the absorbing cares, the

carking anxieties, the seducing temptations of the world, and in the

presence of all the necessity for noble conflict which the world brings

to every man that is not its slave, let us try to keep the roots of our

lives in contact with that soil from which they draw all their

nourishment, and to wrap ourselves round with the life of Jesus Christ,

which shall make an impenetrable shield between us and the fiery darts

of the wicked.' Keep on the lee side of the breakwater and your little

cock-boat will ride out the gale. Keep Christ between you and the

hurtling storm, and there will be a quiet place below the wall where

you may rest, hearing not the loud winds when they call. These things

have I spoken that in Me ye might have peace.'

But there is another condition. Christ speaks the great words which

have been occupying us so long, that they may bring to us peace. I need

not do more than remind you, in a sentence, of the contents of these

wonderful discourses. Think of how they have spoken to us of our

Brother's ascension to Heaven to prepare a place for us; of His coming

again to receive us to Himself; of His presence with us in His absence;

of His indwelling in us and ours in Him; of His gift to us of a divine

Spirit. If we believed all these things; if we realised them and lived

in the faith of them; if we meditated upon them in the midst of our

daily duties; and if they were real to us, and not mere words written

down in a Book, how should anything be able to disturb us, or to shake

our settled confidence? Cleave to the words of the Master, and let them

pour into your hearts the quietness and confidence which nothing else

can give. And then, whatsoever storms may be around, the heart will be

at rest. We find peace nowhere else but where Mary found her repose,

and could shake off care and trouble about many things,' sitting at the

feet of Jesus, wrapt in His love and listening to His word.

II. Then note, secondly, the outward tribulation which is the certain

fate of His followers.

Of course there is a very sad and true sense in which the warning, In

the world ye shall have tribulation,' applies to all men. Pain and

sickness, loss and death, the monotony of hard, continuous, unwelcome

toil, hopes blighted or disappointed even in their fruition, and all

the other ills that flesh is heir to,' afflict us all. But our Lord is

not speaking here about the troubles that befall men as men, nor about

the chastisement that befalls them as sinners, nor about the evils

which dog them because they are mortal or because they are bad, but of

the yet more mysterious sorrows which fall upon them because they are

good, In the world ye have tribulation,' is the proper rendering and

reading. It had already begun, and it was to be the standing condition

and certain fate of all that followed Him.

I have already said that the Christian life moves in two spheres, and

hence there must necessarily be antagonism and conflict. Whoever

realises the inward life in Christ will more or less, and sooner or

later, find himself coming into hostile collision with lives which only

move on the surface and belong to the world. If you and I are

Christians after the pattern of Jesus Christ, then we dwell in the

midst of an order of things which is not constituted on or for the

principles that regulate our lives and the objects at which we aim. And

hence, in that fundamental discordance between the Christian life and

society as it is constituted, there must always be, if there be honesty

and consistency on the side of the Christian man, more or less of

collision between him and it. All that you regard as axiomatic the

world regards as folly, if you take Christ for your Teacher. All that

you labour to secure the world does not care to possess, if you have

Him for your aim. All that you live to seek it has abandoned; all that

you desire to obey it will not even consult, if you are taking Christ

and His law for your rule. And therefore there must come, sooner or

later, and more or less intensely in all Christian lives, opposition

and tribulation. You cannot get away from the necessity, so it is as

well to face it.

No doubt the form of antagonism varies. No doubt the more the world is

penetrated by Christian principles divorced from their root and source,

the less vehement and painful will the collision be. But there is the

gulf, and there it will remain, until the world is a Church. No doubt

some portion of the battlements of organised Christianity has tumbled

into the ditch, and made it a little less deep. Christians have dropped

their standard far too much, and so the antagonism is not so plain as

it ought to be, and as it used to be, and as, some day, it will be. But

there it is, and if you are going to live out and out like a Christian

man, you will get the old sneers flung at you. You will be crotchety,'

impracticable,' spoiling sport,' not to be dealt with,' a wet blanket,'

pharisaical,' bigoted,' and all the rest of the pretty words which have

been so frequently used about the men that try to live like Jesus

Christ. Never mind! In the world ye have tribulation.' I bear in my

body the marks of the Lord Jesus,' the branding-iron which tells to

whom the slave belongs. And if it is His initials that I carry I may be

proud of the marks.

But at any rate there will be antagonism. You young men in your

warehouses, you men that go on Change', we people that live by our pens

or our tongues, and find ourselves in opposition to much of the

tendencies of the present day--we have all, in our several ways, to

bear the cross. Do not let us be ashamed of it, and, above all, do not

let us, for the sake of easing our shoulders, be unfaithful to our

Master. In the world ye have tribulation'; and the Christian man's

peace has to be like the rainbow that lives above the cataract--still

and radiant, whilst it shines above the hell of white waters that are

tortured below.

III. Lastly, notice the courageous confidence which comes from the

Lord's victory.

Be of good cheer!' It is the old commandment that rang out to Joshua

when, on the departure of Moses, the conduct of the war fell into his

less experienced hands: Be strong, and of a good courage; only be thou

strong and very courageous.' So says the Captain of salvation, leaving

His soldiers to face the current of the heady fight in the field. Like

some leader who has climbed the ramparts, or hewed his way through the

broken ranks of the enemies, and rings out the voice of encouragement

and call to his followers, our Captain sets before us His own example:

I have overcome the world,' He said that the day before Calvary. If

that was victory, what would defeat have been?

Notice, then, how our Lord's life was a true battle. The world tried to

draw Him away from God by appealing to things desirable to sense, as in

the wilderness; or to things dreadful to sense, as on the cross; and

both the one and the other form of temptation He faced and conquered.

It was no shadow fight which evoked this paean of victory from His

lips. The reality of His conflict is somewhat concealed from us by

reason of its calm and the completeness of His conquest. We do not

appreciate the force that drives a planet upon its path because it is

calm and continuous and silent, but the power that kept Jesus Christ

continually faithful to His Father, continually sure of that Father's

presence, continually averse to all self-will and selfish living, was a

power mightier then all others that have been manifested in the history

of humanity. The Captain of our salvation has really fought the fight

before us.

But mark, again, that our Lord's life is the type of all victorious

life. The world conquers me when it draws me away from God, when it

makes me its slave, when it coaxes me to trust it, and urges to despair

if I lose it. The world conquers me when it comes between me and God,

when it fills my desires, when it absorbs my energies, when it blinds

my eyes to the things unseen and eternal. I conquer the world when I

put my foot upon its temptations, when I crush it down, when I shake

off its bonds, and when nothing that time and sense, with their

delights or their dreadfulnesses, can bring, prevents me from cleaving

to my Father with all my heart, and from living as His child here.

Whoso thus coerces Time and Sense to be the servants of his filial love

has conquered them both, and whoso lets them draw him away from God is

beaten, however successful he may dream himself to be and men may call

him.

My friends! there is a lesson for Manchester people. Jesus Christ was

not a very successful man according to the standard of Market Street

and the Exchange. He made but a poor thing of the world, and He was

going to be martyred on the cross the day after He said these words.

And yet that was victory. Ay! Many a man beaten down in the struggle of

daily life, and making very little of it, according to our vulgar

estimate, is the true conqueror. Success means making the world a

stepping-stone to God.

Still further, note our share in the Master's victory--I have overcome

the world. Be ye of good cheer.' That seems an irrelevant way of

arguing. What does it matter to me though He has overcome? So much the

better for Him; but what good is it to me?

It may aid us somewhat to more strenuous fighting, if we know that a

brother has fought and conquered, and I do not under-estimate the

blessing and the benefit of the life of Jesus Christ, as recorded in

these Scriptures, even from that, as I conceive it, miserably

inadequate and imperfect point of view. But the victory of Jesus Christ

is of extremely little practical use to me, if all the use of it is to

show me how to fight. Ah! you must go a deal deeper than that. I have

overcome the world, and I will come and put My overcoming Spirit into

your weakness, and fill you with My own victorious life, and make your

hands strong to war and your fingers to fight; and be in you the

conquering and omnipotent Power.'

My friends! Jesus Christ's victory is ours, and we are victors in it,

because He is more than the pattern of brave warfare, He is even the

Son of God, who gave Himself for us, and gives Himself to us, and

dwells in us our Strength and our Righteousness.

Lastly, remember that the condition of that victory's being ours is the

simple act of reliance upon Him and upon it. The man who goes into the

battle as that little army of the Hebrews did against the

wide-stretching hosts of the enemy, saying, O Lord! we know not what to

do, but our eyes are up unto Thee,' will come out more than conqueror

through Him that loved him.' For this is the victory that overcometh

the world, even our faith.'

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THE INTERCESSOR

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said,

Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may

glorify Thee: As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He

should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. And this is

life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus

Christ, whom Thou hast sent. I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have

finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. And now, O Father,

glorify Thou Me with Thine own Self with the glory which I had with

Thee before the world was. I have manifested Thy name unto the men

which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest

them Me; and they have kept Thy word. Now they have known that all

things whatsoever Thou hast given Me, are of Thee. For I have given

unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them,

and have known surely that I came out from Thee, and they have believed

that Thou didst send Me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but

for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine. And all Mine are

Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no

more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy

Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that

they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept

them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of

them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be

fulfilled. And now come I to Thee; and these things I speak in the

world, that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have

given them Thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are

not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that Thou

shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them

from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the

world. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth. As Thou hast

sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be

sanctified through the truth.'--JOHN xvii. 1-19.

We may well despair of doing justice to the deep thoughts of this

prayer, which volumes would not exhaust. Who is worthy to speak or to

write about such sacred words? Perhaps we may best gain some glimpses

of their great and holy sublimity by trying to gather their teaching

round the centres of the three petitions, glorify' (vs. 1, 5), keep'

(v. 11), and sanctify' (v. 17).

I. In verses 1-5, Jesus prays for Himself, that He may be restored to

His pre-incarnate glory; but yet the prayer desires not so much that

glory as affecting Himself, as His being fitted thereby for completing

His work of manifesting the Father. There are three main points in

these verses-the petition, its purpose, and its grounds.

As to the first, the repetition of the request in verses 1 and 5 is

significant, especially if we note that in the former the language is

impersonal, Thy Son,' and continues so till verse 4, where I' and Me'

appear. In verses 1-3, then, the prayer rests upon the ideal relations

of Father and Son, realised in Jesus, while in verses 4 and 5 the

personal element is emphatically presented. The two petitions are in

their scope identical. The glorifying' in the former is more fully

explained in the latter as being that which He possessed in that

ineffable fellowship with the Father, not merely before incarnation,

but before creation. In His manhood He possessed and manifested the

glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth';

but that glory, lustrous though it was, was pale, and humiliation

compared with the light inaccessible, which shone around the Eternal

Word in the bosom of the Father. Yet He who prayed was the same Person

who had walked in that light before time was, and now in human flesh

asked for what no mere manhood could bear. The first form of the

petition implies that such a partaking in the uncreated glory of the

Father is the natural prerogative of One who is the Son,' while the

second implies that it is the appropriate recompense of the earthly

life and character of the man Jesus.

The petition not only reveals the conscious divinity of the Son, but

also His willing acceptance of the Cross; for the glorifying sought is

that reached through death, resurrection, and ascension, and that

introductory clause, the hour is come,' points to the impending

sufferings as the first step in the answer to the petition. The

Crucifixion is always thus treated in this Gospel, as being both the

lowest humiliation and the lifting up' of the Son; and here He is

reaching out His hand, as it were, to draw His sufferings nearer. So

willingly and desiringly did this Isaac climb the mount of sacrifice.

Both elements of the great saying in the Epistle to the Hebrews are

here: For the joy that was set before Him, [He] endured the Cross.'

The purpose of the petition is to be noted; namely, the Son's

glorifying of the Father. No taint of selfishness corrupted His prayer.

Not for Himself, but for men, did He desire His glory. He sought return

to that serene and lofty seat, and the elevation of His limited manhood

to the throne, not because He was wearied of earth or impatient of

weakness, sorrows, or limitations, but that He might more fully

manifest by that Glory, the Father's name. To make the Father known is

to make the Father glorious; for He is all fair and lovely. That

revelation of divine perfection, majesty, and sweetness was the end of

Christ's earthly life, and is the end of His heavenly divine activity.

He needs to reassume the prerogatives of which He needed to divest

Himself, and both necessities have one end. He had to lay aside His

garments and assume the form of a servant, that He might make God

known; but, that revelation being complete, He must take His garments

and sit down again, before He can go on to tell all the meaning of what

He has done unto us.'

The ground of the petition is twofold. Verses 2 and 3 represent the

glory sought for, as the completion of the Son's mission and task.

Already He had been endowed with authority over all flesh,' for the

purpose of bestowing eternal life; and that eternal life stands in the

knowledge of God, which is the same as the knowledge of Christ. The

present gift to the Son and its purpose are thus precisely parallel

with the further gift desired, and that is the necessary carrying out

of this. The authority and office of the incarnate Christ demand the

glory of, and consequent further manifestation by, the glorified

Christ. The life which He comes to give is a life which flows from the

revelation that He makes of the Father, received, not as mere

intellectual knowledge, but as loving acquaintance.

The second ground for the petition is in verse 4, the actual perfect

fulfilment by the Son of that mission. What untroubled consciousness of

sinless obedience and transparent shining through His life of the

Father's likeness and will He must have had, who could thus assert His

complete realisation of that Father's revealing purpose, as the ground

of His deserving and desiring participation in the divine glory! Surely

such words are either the acme of self-righteousness or the

self-revealing speech of the Son of God.

II. With verse 6 we pass to the more immediate reference to the

disciples, and the context from thence to verse 15 may be regarded as

all clustered round the second petition keep' (v. 11). That central

request is preceded and followed by considerations of the disciples'

relation to Christ and to the world, which may be regarded as its

grounds. The whole context preceding the petition may be summed up in

two grounds for the prayer--the former set forth at length, and the

latter summarily; the one being the genuine, though incomplete

discipleship of the men for whom Christ prays (vs. 6-10), and the

latter their desolate condition without Jesus (v. 11).

It is beautiful to see how our Lord here credits the disciples with

genuine grasp, both in heart and head, of His teaching. He had shortly

before had to say, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou

not known Me?' and soon they all forsook Him and fled.' But beneath

misconception and inadequate apprehension there lived faith and love;

and He saw the full corn in the ear,' when only the green blade' was

visible, pushing itself above the surface. We may take comfort from

this generous estimate of imperfect disciples. If He did not tend,

instead of quenching, dimly burning wicks,' where would He have lights

in the world?'

Verse 6 lays down the beginning of discipleship as threefold: Christ's

act in revealing; the Father's, in giving men to Jesus; and men's, in

keeping the Father's word. Thy word' is the whole revelation by Christ,

which is, as this Gospel so often repeats, not His own, but the

Father's. These three facts underlying discipleship are pleas for the

petition to follow; for unless the feeble disciples are kept' in the

name, as in a fortress, Christ's work of revelation is neutralised, the

Father's gift to Him made of none effect, and the incipient disciples

will not keep' His word. The plea is, in effect, Forsake not the works

of thine own hands'; and, like all Christ's prayers, it has a promise

in its depths, since God does not begin what He will not finish; and it

has a warning, too, that we cannot keep ourselves unless a stronger

Hand keeps us.

Verses 7 and 8 carry on the portraiture of discipleship, and thence

draw fresh pleas. The blessed result of accepting Christ's revelation

is a knowledge, built on happy experience, and, like the acquaintance

of heart with heart, issuing in the firm conviction that Christ's words

and deeds are from God. Why does He say, All things whatsoever Thou

hast given,' instead of simply that I have' or declare'? Probably it is

the natural expression of His consciousness, the lowly utterance of His

obedience, claiming nothing as His own, and yet claiming all, while the

subsequent clause are of Thee' expresses the disciples' conviction. In

like fashion our Lord, in verse 8, declares that His words, in their

manifoldness (contrast v. 6, Thy word'), were all received by Him from

the Father, and accepted by the disciples, with the result that they

came, as before, to know' by inward acquaintance with Him as a person,

and so to have the divinity of His Person certified by experience, and

further came to believe' that God had sent Him, which was a conviction

arrived at by faith. So knowledge, which is personal experience and

acquaintance, and faith, which rises to the heights of the Father's

purpose, come from the humble acceptance of the Christ declaring the

Father's name. First faith, then knowledge, and then a fuller faith

built on it, and that faith in its turn passing into knowledge (v.

25)--these are the blessings belonging to the growth of true

discipleship, and are discerned by the loving eye of Jesus in very

imperfect followers.

In verse 9 Jesus assumes the great office of Intercessor. I pray for

them' is not so much prayer as His solemn presentation of Himself

before the Father as the High-priest of His people. It marks an epoch

in His work. The task of bringing God to man is substantially complete.

That of bringing men by supplication to God is now to begin. It is the

revelation of the permanent office of the departed Lord. Moses on the

Mount holds up the rod, and Israel prevails (Exod. xvii. 9). The

limitation of this prayer to the disciples applies only to the special

occasion, and has no bearing on the sweep of His redeeming purpose or

the desires of His all-pitying heart. The reasons for His intercession

follow in verses 9-11a. The disciples are the Father's, and continue so

even when given' to Christ, in accordance with the community of

possession, which oneness of nature and perfectness of love establish

between the Father and the Son. God cannot but care for those who are

His. The Son cannot but pray for those who are His. Their having

recognised Him for what He was binds Him to pray for them. He is

glorified in disciples, and if we show forth His character, He will be

our Advocate. The last reason for His prayer is the loneliness of the

disciples and their exposure in the world without Him. His departure

impelled Him to Intercede, both as being a leaving them defenceless and

as being an entrance into the heavenly state of communion with the

Father.

In the petition itself (v. 11b), observe the invocation Holy Father!'

with special reference to the prayer for preservation from the

corruption of the world. God's holiness is the pledge that He will make

us holy, since He is Father' as well. Observe the substance of the

request, that the disciples should be kept, as in a fortress, within

the enclosing circle of the name which God has given to Jesus. The name

is the manifestation of the divine nature. It was given to Jesus,

inasmuch as He, the Word,' had from the beginning the office of

revealing God; and that which was spoken of the Angel of the Covenant

is true in highest reality of Jesus: My name is in Him.' The name of

the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe.'

Observe the issue of this keeping; namely, the unity of believers. The

depths of that saying are beyond us, but we can at least see thus

far--that the true bond of unity is the name in which all who are one

are kept; that the pattern of the true unity of believers is the

ineffable union of Father and Son, which is oneness of will and nature,

along with distinctness of persons; and that therefore this purpose

goes far deeper than outward unity of organisation.

Then follow other pleas, which are principally drawn from Christ's

relation to the disciples, now ending; whereas the former ones were

chiefly deduced from the disciples' relation to Him. He can no more do

what He has done, and commits it to the Father. Happy we if we can

leave our unfinished tasks to be taken up by God, and trust those whom

we leave undefended to be shielded by Him! I kept' is, in the Greek,

expressive of continuous, repeated action, while I guarded' gives the

single issue of the many acts of keeping. Jesus keeps His disciples now

as He did then, by sedulous, patient, reiterated acts, so that they are

safe from evil. But note where He kept them--in Thy name.' That is our

place of safety, a sure defence and inexpugnable fortress. One, indeed,

was lost; but that was not any slur on Christ's keeping, but resulted

from his own evil nature, as being a son of loss' (if we may so

preserve the affinity of the words in the Greek), and from the divine

decree from of old. Sharply defined and closely united are the two

apparent contradictories of man's free choice of destruction and God's

foreknowledge. Christ saw them in harmony, and we shall do so one day.

Then the flow of the prayer recurs to former thoughts. Going away so

soon, He yearned to leave them sharers of His own emotions in the

prospect of His departure to the Father, and therefore He had admitted

them (and us) to hear this sacred outpouring of His desires. If we laid

to heart the blessed revelations of this disclosure of Christ's heart,

and followed Him with faithful gaze as He ascends to the Father, and

realised our share in that triumph, our empty vessels would be filled

by some of that same joy which was His. Earthly joy can never be full;

Christian joy should never be anything less than full.

Then follows a final glance at the disciples' relation to the world, to

which they are alien because they are of kindred to Him. This is the

ground for the repetition of the prayer keep', with the difference that

formerly it was keep in Thy name,' and now it is from the evil.' It is

good to gaze first on our defence, the munitions of rocks' where we lie

safely, and then we can venture to face the thought of the evil,' from

which that keeps us, whether it be personal or abstract.

III. Verses 16-19 give the final petition for the immediate circle of

disciples, with its grounds. The position of alienation from the world,

in which the disciples stand by reason of their assimilation to Jesus,

is repeated here. It was the reason for the former prayer, keep'; it is

the reason for the new petition, sanctify.' Keeping comes first, and

then sanctifying, or consecration. Security from evil is given that we

may be wholly devoted to the service of God. The evil in the world is

the great hindrance to that. The likeness to Jesus is the great ground

of hope that we shall be truly consecrated. We are kept in the name';

we are consecrated in the truth,' which is the revelation made by

Jesus, and in a very deep sense is Himself. That truth is, as it were,

the element in which the believer lives, and by abiding in which his

real consecration is possible.

Christ's prayer for us should be our aim and deepest desire for

ourselves, and His declaration of the condition of its fulfilment

should prescribe our firm adhesion to, and constant abiding in, the

truth as revealed and embodied in Him, as the only means by which we

can attain the consecration which is at once, as the closing verses of

the passage tell us, the means by which we may fulfil the purpose for

which we are sent into the world, and the path on which we reach

complete assimilation to His perfect self-surrender. All Christians are

sent into the world by Jesus, as Jesus was sent by the Father. We have

the charge to glorify Him. We have the presence of the Sender with us,

the sent. We are inspired with His Spirit. We cannot do His work

without that entire consecration which shall copy His devotion to the

Father and eager swiftness to do His will. How can such ennobling and

exalted consecration be ours? There is but one way. He has consecrated

Himself,' and by union with Him through faith, our selfishness may be

subdued, and the Spirit of Christ may dwell in our hearts, to make us

living sacrifices, consecrated and acceptable to God.' Then shall we be

truly consecrated,' and then only, when we can say, I live; yet not I,

but Christ liveth in me.' That is the end of Christ's consecration of

Himself--the prayer which He prayed for His disciples--and should be

the aim which every disciple earnestly pursues.

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THE LORD THEE KEEPS'

. . . They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray

not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou

shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I

am not of the world.'--JOHN xvii. 14-16.

We have here a petition imbedded in a reiterated statement of the

disciples' isolated position when left in a hostile world without

Christ's sheltering presence. We cannot fathom the depth of the mystery

of the praying Christ, but we may be sure of this, that His prayers

were always in harmony with the Father's will, were, in fact, the

expression of that will, and were therefore promises and prophecies.

What He prays the Father for His disciples He gives to His disciples.

Once only had He to say, If it be possible'; at all other times He

prayed as sure that Thou hearest Me always,' and in this very prayer He

speaks in a tone of strange authority, when He prays for all believers

in future ages, and says: I will that, where I am, they also may be

with Me.' In this High-priestly prayer, offered when Gethsemane was

almost in sight, and the Judgment Hall and Calvary were near, our

Lord's tender interest in His disciples fills His mind, and even in its

earlier portion, which is in form a series of petitions for Himself, it

is in essence a prayer for them, whilst this central section which

concerns the Apostles, and the closing section which casts the mantle

of His love and care over all who hereafter shall believe on Me through

their word,' witnesses to the sublime completeness of His

self-oblivion. Gethsemane heard His prayer for Himself; here He prays

for His people, and the calm serenity and confident assurance of this

prayer, set against the agitation of that other, receives and gives

emphasis by the contrast.

Our text falls into two parts, the enclosing circle of the repeated

statement of the disciples' isolation in an alien world, and the

enclosed jewel of the all-sufficient prayer which guarantees their

protection. We shall best make its comfort and cheer our own by dealing

with these two successively.

I. The disciples' isolation.

Of course we are to interpret the world' here in accordance with the

ethical usage of that term in this Gospel, according to which it means

the aggregate of mankind considered as apart from and alien to God. It

is roughly equivalent to the modern phrase, society.'

With that order of things Christ's real followers are not in accord.

That want of accord depends upon their accord with Jesus.

Every Christian has the mind of Christ' in him, in the measure of his

Christianity. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master'

But Christian discipleship has a better guarantee for the assimilation

of the disciple to his Lord than the ordinary forms of the relation of

teacher and taught ever present. There is a participation in the

Master's life, an implantation in the scholar's spirit of the Teacher's

Spirit. Christ in us' is not only the hope of glory,' but the power

which makes possible and actual the present possession of a life

kindred with, because derived from, and essentially one with, His life.

They whose spirits are touched by the indwelling Christ to the fine

issues' of sympathy with the law of His earthly life cannot but live in

the world as aliens, and wander amid its pitfalls with blank

misgivings' and a chill sense that this is not their rest. They are

knit to One whose meat and drink' was to do the will of the Father in

heaven, who pleased not Himself,' whose life was all one long service

and sacrifice for men, whose joys were not fed by earthly possessions

or delights. How should they have a sense of community of aims with

grovelling hearts that cling to wealth or ambition, that are not at

peace with God, and have no holdfasts beyond this bank and shoal of

time'? A man who has drunk into the spirit of Christ's life is thereby

necessarily thrown out of gear with the world.

Happy is he if his union with Jesus is so deep and close that it is but

deepened by his experience of the lack of sympathy between the world

and himself! Happy if his consciousness of not being of the world' but

quickens his desire to help the world and glorify his Lord, by bringing

His all-sufficiency into its emptiness, and leading it, too, to discern

His sweetness and beauty!

But how little the life of the average Christian corresponds to this

reiterated utterance of our Lord! Who of us dare venture to take it on

our lips and to say that we are not of the world even as He is not of

the world'? Is not our relation to that world of which Jesus here

speaks a contrast rather than a parallel to His? The prince of this

world' had nothing in Christ, as He himself declared, but He has much

in each of us. There are stored up heaps of combustibles in every one

of us which catch fire only too swiftly, and burn but too fiercely,

when the fiery darts of the wicked' fall among them. Instead of an

instinctive recoil from the view of life characteristic of the world,'

we must confess, if we are honest, that it draws us strongly, and many

of us are quite at home with it. Why is this but because we do not

habitually live near enough to our Lord to drink in His Spirit? The

measure of our discord with the world is the measure of our accord with

our Saviour. It is in the degree in which we possess His life that we

come to be aliens here, and it is in the degree in which we keep in

touch with Jesus, and keep our hearts wide open for the entrance of His

Spirit, that we possess His life. A worldly Christian--no uncommon

character--is a Christian who has all but shut himself off from the

life which Christ breathes into the expectant soul.

II. The disciples' guarded security.

Jesus encloses His prayer between the two parts of that repeated

statement of the disciples' isolation. It is like some lovely, peaceful

plain circled by grim mountains. The isolation is a necessary

consequence of the disciples' previous union with Him. It involves much

that is painful to the unrenewed part of their natures, but their

Lord's prayer is more than enough for their security and peace.

I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world.' They are in

it by God's appointment for great purposes, affecting their own

characters and affecting the world, with which Christ will not

interfere. It is their training ground, their school. The sense of

belonging to another order is to be intensified by their experiences in

it, and these are to make more vivid the hopes that yearn towards the

true home, and to develop the wrestling thews that throw the world.'

The discipline of life is too precious to be tampered with even by a

Saviour's prayer, and He loves His people too wisely to seek to shelter

them from its roughness, and to procure for them exemption which would

impoverish their characters.

So let us learn the lesson and shape our desires after the pattern of

our Lord's prayer for us, nor blindly seek for that ease which He would

not ask for us. False asceticism that shrinks from contact with an

alien world, weak running from trials and temptations, selfish desires

for exemption from sorrows, are all rebuked by this prayer. Christ's

relation to the world is our pattern, and we are not to seek for

pillows in an order of things where He had not where to lay His head.'

But He does ask for His people that they may be kept from evil,' or

from the evil One.' That prayer is, as we have said, a promise and a

prophecy. But the fulfilment of it in each individual disciple hinges

on the disciple's keeping himself in touch with Jesus, whereby the much

virtue' of His prayer will encompass him and keep him safe. We do not

discuss the alternative renderings, according to one of which the evil'

is impersonal, and according to the other of which it is concentrated

in the personal prince of this world.' In either case, it is the evil'

against which the disciples are to be guarded, whether it has a

personal source or not.

Here, in Christ's intercession, is the firm ground of our confidence

that we may be more than conquerors' in the life-long fight which we

have to wage. The sweet strong old psalm is valid in its assurances

to-day for every soul which puts itself under the shadow of Christ's

protecting intercession: The Lord shall keep thee from all evil, He

shall keep thy soul.' We have not to lift up our eyes unto the hills,'

for vainly is help hoped for from the multitude of the mountains,' but

Our help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth.' Therefore

we may dwell at peace in the midst of an alien world, having the Father

for our Keeper, and the Son, who overcame the world, for our

Intercessor, our Pattern and our Hope.

The parallel between Christ and His people applies to their relations

to the present order of things: They are not of the world, even as I am

not of the world.' It applies to their mission here: As Thou didst send

Me into the world, even so sent I them into the world.' It applies to

the future: I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and

I come to Thee,' and in that coming' lies the guarantee that His

servants will, each in his due time, come out from this alien world and

pass into the state which is home, because He is there. The prayer that

they might be kept from the evil, while remaining in the scene where

evil is rampant, is crowned by the prayer: I will that, where I am,

they also may be with Me, that they may behold My glory.'

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THE HIGH PRIEST'S PRAYER

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe

on Me through their word; That they all may be one; as Thou, Father,

art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the

world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou

givest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and

that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as

Thou hast loved Me. Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given

Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou

hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world.

O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known

Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me. And I have declared

unto them Thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith Thou

hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.'--JOHN xvii. 20-26.

The remainder of this prayer reaches out to all generations of

believers to the end. We may incidentally note that it shows that Jesus

did not anticipate a speedy end of the history of the world or the

Church; and also that it breathes but one desire, that for the Church's

unity, as though He saw what would be its greatest peril.

Characteristic, too, of the idealism of this Gospel is it that there is

no name for that future community. It is not called church,' or

congregation,' or the like--it is them also that believe on Me through

their word,' a great spiritual community, held together by common faith

in Him whom the Apostles preached. Is not that still the best

definition of Christians, and does not such a conception of it

correspond better to its true nature than the formal abstraction, the

Church'?

We can but touch in the most inadequate fashion the profound words of

this section of the prayer which would take volumes to expound fitly.

We note that it contains four periods, in each of which something is

asked or stated, and then a purpose to be attained by the petition or

statement is set forth.

First comes the prayer for unity and what the answer to it will effect

(v. 21). Now in this verse the unity of believers is principally

regarded as resulting from the inclusion, if we may so say, of them all

in the ineffable union of the Father and the Son. Jesus prays that they

may all be one,' and also that they also may be in us' (Rev. Ver.). And

their unity is no mere matter of formal external organisation nor of

unanimity of creed, or the like, but it is a deep, vital unity. The

pattern of it is the unity of the Father and the Son, and the power

that brings it about is the abiding of all believers in us.' The result

of such a manifestation in the world of a multitude of men, in all of

whom one life evidently moves, fusing their individualities while

retaining their personalities, will be the world's conviction of the

divine mission of Jesus. The world was beginning to feel its

convictions moving slowly in that direction, when it exclaimed: Behold

how these Christians love one another!' The alienation of Christians

has given barbs and feathers to its arrows of scorn. But it is the

unity of the Spirit,' not that of a, great corporation, that Christ's

prayer desires.

The petitions for what would be given to believers passes for a moment

into a statement of what Jesus had already given to them. He had begun

the unifying gift, and that made a plea for its perfecting. The glory'

which He had given to these poor bewildered Galilaeans was but in a

rudimentary stage; but still, wherever there is faith in Him, there is

some communication of His life and Spirit, and some of that veiled and

yet radiant glory, full of grace and truth,' which shone through the

covering when the Incarnate Word became flesh.' It is the Christ-given

Christ-likeness in each which knits believers into one. It is Christ in

us and we in Christ that fuses us into one, and thereby makes each

perfect. And such flashing back of the light of Jesus from a million

separate crystals, all glowing with one light and made one in the

light, would flash on darkest eyes the lustre of the conviction that

God sent Christ, and that God's love enfolded those Christlike souls

even as it enfolded Him.

Again (v. 24) comes a petition with its result. And here there is no

mention of the effect of the answer on the world. For the moment the

thoughts of isolation in, and a message to, the world fade away. The

partially-possessed glory' seems to have led on Christ's thoughts to

the calm home of perfection waiting for Him who was not of the world'

and was sent into it, and for the humble ones who had taken Him for

Lord. I will that'--that is a strange tone for a prayer. What

consciousness on Christ's part does it involve? The disciples are not

now called them that should believe on Me,' but that which Thou hast

given Me,' the individuals melt into the great whole. They are

Christ's, not merely by their faith or man's preaching, but by the

Father's gift. And the fact of that gift is used as a plea with Him, to

perfect that which concerneth' them, and to complete the unity of

believers with Jesus by bringing them to be with Him' in His triumphant

session at the right hand. To behold' will be the same as to share His

glory, not only that which we beheld when He tabernacled among us, but

that which He had in the pouring out on Him of God's love before the

foundation of the world.' Our dim eyes cannot follow the happy souls as

they are lost in the blaze, but we know that they walk in light and are

like Him, for they see Him as He is.'

The last statement (vs. 25, 26) is not petition but vow, and, to our

ears, promise. The contrast of the world and believers appears for the

last time. What made the world a world' was its not knowing God; what

made believers isolated in, and having an errand to, the world, was

that they knew' (not merely believed,' but knew by experience) that

Jesus had been sent from God to make known His name. All our knowledge

of God comes through Him; it is for us to recognise His divine mission,

and then He will unveil, more and more, with blessed continuity of

increasing knowledge, the Name, and with growing knowledge of it

growing measures of God's love will be in us, and Jesus Himself will

dwell in our hearts by faith' more completely and more blessedly

through an eternity of wider knowledge and more fervent love.

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THE FOLDED FLOCK

I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am;

that they may behold My glory.'--JOHN xvii. 24.

This wonderful prayer is (a) for Jesus Himself, (b) for the Apostles,

(c) for the whole Church on earth and in heaven.

I. The prayer.

I will' has a strange ring of authority. It is the expression of His

love to men, and of His longing for their presence with Him in His

glory. Not till they are with Him there, shall He see of the travail of

His soul and be satisfied.'

We have here a glimpse of the blessed state of the dead in Christ.

(a) Local presence with Christ. His glorified body is somewhere. The

value of this thought is that it gives solidity to our ideas of a

future life. There they are. We need not dwell on the metaphysical

difficulties about locality for disembodied spirits.

If a spirit can be localised in a body, I suppose it can be localised

without a body; but passing by all that, we have the hope held out here

of a real local presence with the glorified humanity of our Lord. We

speak of the dead as gone from us, and we have that idea far more

vividly in our minds than that of their having gone to Him. We speak of

the departed,' but we do not think of them as arrived.' We look down to

the narrow grave, but we forget He is not here, He is risen. Why seek

ye the living among the dead?' Ah! if we could only bring home to our

hearts the solid prose of the conviction that where Christ is there His

servants are, and that not in the diffused ubiquity of His Divine

Omnipresence, it would go far to remove the darkness and vague mist

which wrap the future, and to set it as it really is before us, as a

solid definite reality. We see the sails glide away out into the west

as the sun goes down, and we think of them as tossing on a midnight

sea, an unfathomable waste. Try to think of them more truly. As in that

old miracle, He comes to them walking on the water in the night watch,

and if at first they are terrified, His voice brings back hope to the

heart that is beginning to stand still, and immediately they are at the

land whither they go. Now, as they sink from our sight, they are in

port, sails furled and anchor dropped, and green fields round them,

even while we watch the sinking masts, and cannot yet rightly tell

whether the fading sail has faded wholly.

(b) Communion with Christ.

Our Lord says not only that where I am, they also may be,' but adds

with Me.' That is not a superfluous addition, but emphasises the

thought of a communion which is more intimate and blessed than local

presence alone would be.

The communion here is real but imperfect. It is perfected there on our

part by the dropping away of flesh and sin, by change of circumstances,

by emancipation from cares and toils necessary here, by the development

of new powers and surroundings, and on His side by new manifestations.

(c) Vision of His glory.

The crown of this utterance of Christ's will is that they may behold My

glory.' In an earlier part of this prayer our Lord had spoken of the

glory which I had with Thee before the world was.' But probably the

glory given' is not that of essential Divinity, but that of His

mediatorial work. To His people with Him where He is,' are imparted

fuller views of Christ as Saviour, deeper notions of His work, clearer

perception of His rule in providence and nature. This is the loftiest

employment of the spirits who are perfected and lapped in pleasures for

evermore' by their union with the glorified Jesus.

Surely this is grander than all metaphorical pictures of heaven.

II. The incipient fulfilment now going on.

The prayer has been in process of fulfilment ever since. The dead in

Christ have entered on its answer now.

We need not discuss difficulties about the intermediate state,' for

this at all events is true, that to be absent from the body' is to be

present with the Lord.'

A Christian death is an answer to this prayer. True, for Christians as

for all, the physical necessity is an imperative law. True, the

punitive aspect of death is retained for them. But yet the law is

wielded by Christ, and while death remains, its whole aspect is

changed. So we may think of those who have departed in His faith and

fear as gone in answer to this prayer.

How beautiful that is! Slowly, one by one, they are gathered in, as the

stars one by one light up. Place after place is filled.

Thus through the ages the prayer works on, and our dear ones have gone

from us, but they have gone to Him. We weep, but they rejoice. To us

their departure is the result of an iron law, of a penal necessity, of

some secondary cause; but to them it is seen to be the answer to His

mighty prayer. They hear His voice and follow Him when He says, Come up

hither.'

III. The final fulfilment still future.

The prayer looks forward to a perfect fulfilment. His prayer cannot be

vain.

(a) Perfect in degree.

(b) Perfect in extent, when all shall be gathered together and the

whole family' shall be in heaven,' and Christ's own word receives its

crowning realisation, that of all whom the Father hath given Him He has

lost nothing.'

And these are not some handful picked out by a decree which we can

neither fathom nor alter, but Christ is given to us all, and if we

choose to take Him, then for us He has ascended; and as we watch Him

going up the voice comes to us: I go to prepare a place for you. I will

come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may

be also.'

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CHRIST'S SUMMARY OF HIS WORK

I have declared onto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love

wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.'--JOHN

xvii. 26.

This is the solemn and calm close of Christ's great High-priestly

prayer; the very last words that He spoke before Gethsemane and His

passion. In it He sums up both the purpose of His life and the

petitions of His prayer, and presents the perfect fulfilment of the

former as the ground on which He asks the fulfilment of the latter.

There is a singular correspondence and contrast between these last

words to God and the last words to the disciples, which immediately

preceded them. These were, In the world ye shall have tribulation, but

be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' In both He sums up His

life, in both He is unconscious of flaw, imperfection, or limitation;

in both He shares His own possessions among His followers. But His

words to men carry a trace of His own conflict and a foreboding of

theirs. For Him life had been, and for them it was to be, tribulation

and a battle, and the highest thing that He could promise them was

victory won by conflict. But from the serene elevation of the prayer

all such thoughts disappear. Unbroken calm lies over it. His life has

been one continual manifestation of the name of God; and the portion

that He promises to His followers is not victory won by strife, but the

participation with Himself in the love of God.

Both views are true--true to His experience, true to ours. The

difference between them lies in the elevation of the beholder's eye.

Looked at on the outward side, His life and ours must be always a

battle and often a sorrow. Looked at from within, His life was an

unbroken abiding in the love of God, and a continual impartation of the

name of God, and our lives may be an ever growing knowledge of God,

leading to and being a fuller and fuller possession of His love, and of

a present Christ. So let us ponder these deep words: our Lord's own

summing up of His work and aims; His statement of what we may hope to

attain; and the path by which we may attain it. I shall best bring out

the whole fullness of their meaning if I simply follow them word by

word.

I. Note, first, the backward look of the revealing Son.

I have declared Thy name.'

The first thing that strikes one about these words is their boldness.

Remember that they are spoken to God, at the close of a life the

heights and depths of which they sum up. They are an appeal to God's

righteous judgment of the whole character of the career. Do they

breathe the tone that we might expect? Surely the prophet or teacher

who has most earnestly tried to make himself a mirror, without spot to

darken and without dint to distort the divine ray, will be the first to

feel, as he looks back, the imperfections of his repetition of his

message. But Jesus Christ, when He looks back over His life, has no

flaw, limitation, incompleteness, to record or to confess. As always so

here, He is absolutely unconscious of anything in the nature of

weakness, error, or sin. As when He looked back upon His life as a

conflict, He had no defeats to remember with shame, so here, when He

looks upon it as the revelation of God He feels that everything which

He has received of the Father He has made known unto men.

And the strange thing is that we admit the claim, and have become so

accustomed to regard it as being perfectly legitimate that we forget

how enormous it is. He takes an attitude here which in any other man

would be repulsive, but in Him is supremely natural. We criticise other

people, we outgrow their teachings, we see where their doctrines have

deviated from truth by excess or defect, or disproportion; but when He

says I have declared Thy name,' we feel that He says nothing more than

the simple facts of His life vindicate and confirm.

Not less remarkable is the implication in these words, not only of the

completeness of His message, but of the fullness of His knowledge of

God, and its entirely underived nature. So He claims for Himself an

altogether special and unique position here: He has learned God from

none; He teaches God to all. That was the true Light which lighteth

every man that cometh into the world.'

Looking a little more closely at these words before us, we have here

Christ's own account of His whole life. The meaning of it all is the

revelation of the heart of God. Not by words, of course; not by words

only, but far more by deeds. And I would have you ask yourselves this

question--If the deeds of a man are a declaration of the name of God,

what sort of a man is He who thus declares Him? Must we not feel that

if these words, or anything like them, really came from the lips of

Jesus Christ, we are here in the presence of something other than a

holy life of a simple humanity, which might help men to climb to the

apprehension of a God who was perfect love; and that when He says He

that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,' we stand before God manifest

in the flesh.'

What is that name of God which the revealing Son declares? Not the mere

syllables by which we call Him, but the manifested character of the

Father. That one name, in the narrower sense of the word, carries the

whole revelation that Jesus Christ has to make; for it speaks of

tenderness, of kindred, of paternal care, of the transmission of a

nature, of the embrace of a divine love. And it delivers men from all

their creeping dreads, from all their dark peradventures, from all

their stinging fears, from all the paralysing uncertainties which, like

clouds, always misty and often thunder-bearing, have shut out the sight

of the divine face. If this Christ, in His weakness and humanity, with

pity welling from His eyes, and making music of His voice, with the

swift help streaming from His fingers-tips to every pain and weariness,

and the gracious righteousness that drew little children and did not

repel publicans and harlots, is our best image of God, then love is the

centre of divinity, and all the rest that we call God is but

circumference and fringe of that central brightness.

So through the thunder comes a human voice Saying, "O heart I made! a

heart beats here."'

He has declared God's name, His last best name of Love.

Need I dwell for one moment on the fact that that name is only declared

by this Son? There is no need to deny the presence of manifold other

precious sources in men's experience and lives from which something may

be inferred of what God truly is. But all these, rich and manifold as

they are, fall into nothingness before the life of Jesus Christ,

considered as the making visible of God. For all the rest are partial

and incomplete. At sundry times and in divers manners' God flung forth

syllables of the name, and fragments of that mighty voice came rolling

down the wind.' But in Jesus Christ the whole name, in all its

syllables, is spoken. Other sources of knowledge are ambiguous, and

need the interpretation of Christ's life and Cross ere they can be

construed into a harmonious whole. Life, nature, our inmost being,

history, all these sources speak with two voices; and it is only when

we hear the deep note that underlies them in the word of Christ that

their discord becomes a harmony. Other sources lack authority. They

come at the most with a may be.' He comes with a Verily, verily.' Other

sources speak to the understanding, or the conscience, or to fear.

Christ speaks to the heart. Other sources leave the man who accepts

them unaffected. Christ's message penetrates to the transforming and

assimilation of the whole being.

So, dear brethren! for all generations, and for this generation most of

all, the plain alternative lies between the declaration of the name of

God in Jesus Christ and a godless and orphan world. Modern thought will

make short work of all other sources of certitude about the character

of God, and will leave men alone in the dark. Christ, the historical

fact of the life and death of Jesus Christ, is the sole surviving

source of certitude, which is blessedness, as to whether there is a

God, and what sort of a God He is.

II. Secondly, note here that strange forward look of the dying Man: I

have declared Thy name and will declare it.'

And that was said within eight and forty hours of the Cross, which, if

He had been a simple human teacher and martyr, would have ended all His

activity in the world. But here He is not merely summing up His life,

and laying it aside, writing the last sentence, as it were, which

gathers up the whole of the completed book, but He is closing the first

volume, and in the act of doing so He stretches out His hand to open

the second. I will declare it.' When? How? Did not earthly life, then,

put a stop to this Teacher's activity? Was there still prophetic

function to be done after death had sealed His lips? Certainly.

That anticipation, which at once differentiates Him from all the brood

of merely human teachers and prophets, even the highest, does indeed

include as future, at the moment when He speaks, the swiftly coming and

close Cross; but it goes beyond it. How much of Christendom's knowledge

of God depended upon the Passion, on the threshold of which Christ was

standing? He, hanging on the Cross in weakness, and dying there amidst

the darkness that overspread the land, is a strange Revealer of the

omnipotent, infinite, ever-blessed God. But Oh! if we strike Gethsemane

and Calvary out of Christ's manifestation of the Father, how infinitely

poorer are we and the world! God commendeth,' (rather establisheth,')

His love toward us in that whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for

us.' And so as we turn ourselves to the little knoll outside the gate,

where the Nazarene carpenter hangs faint and dying, we--wonder of

Wonders, and yet certainty of certainties!--have to say, Lo! this is

our God; we have waited for Him.'

But that future revelation extends beyond the Cross, and includes

resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, and the whole history of the Church

right onwards through the ages. The difference between the two volumes

of revelation--that which includes the work of Christ upon earth, and

that which includes His revelation from the heavens--is this, that the

first volume contains all the facts, and the second volume contains His

interpretation and application of the facts in the understandings and

hearts of His people. We have no more facts from which to construe God

than these which belong to the earthly life of Jesus Christ, and we

never shall have, here at all events. But whilst the first volume to

the bottom of the last page is finished and tolerates and needs no

additions, day by day, moment by moment, epoch by epoch Christ is

bringing His people to a fuller understanding of the significance of

the first volume, and writing the second more and more upon their

hearts.

So we have an ever-living Christ, still the active Teacher of His

Church. Times of unsettlement and revolutionary change and the shaking

of the things that are made,' like the times in which we live, are but

times in which the great Teacher is setting some new lesson from the

old Book to His slow scholars. There is always a little confusion in

the schoolroom when the classes are being rearranged and new books are

being put into old hands. The tributary stream, as it rushes in, makes

broken water for a moment. Do not let us be afraid when the things that

can be shaken' shake, but let us see in the shaking the attendant of a

new curriculum on which the great Teacher is launching His scholars,

and let us learn the new lessons of the old Gospel which He is then

teaching.

III. Thirdly, note the participation in the Father's love which is the

issue of the knowledge of the Father's name.

Christ says that His end, an end which is surely attained in the

declaration of the divine name, is that the love wherewith Thou hast

loved Me may be in them.' We are here touching upon heights too dizzy

for free and safe walking, on glories too bright for close and steady

gaze. But where Christ has spoken we may reverently follow. Mark, then,

that marvellous thought of the identity between the love which was His

and the love which is ours. From everlasting' that divine love lay on

the Eternal Word which in the hoary beginning, before the beginning of

creatures, was with God, and was God.' The deepest conception that we

can form of the divine nature is of a Being who in Himself carries the

Subject and the Object of an eternal love, which we speak of in the

deep emblem of the Word,' and the God with whom He eternally was.' That

love lay upon Christ, without limitation, without reservation, without

interruption, finding nothing there from which it recoiled, and nothing

there which did not respond to it. No mist, no thunderstorm, ever broke

that sunshine, no tempest ever swept across that calm. Continuous,

full, perfect was the love that knit the Father to the Son, and

continuous, full, and perfect was the consciousness of abiding in that

love, which lay like light upon the spirit of Him that said I delight

to do Thy will.' The Father hath not left Me alone.'

And all that love Christ gives to us as deep, as continuous, as

unreserved. Our consciousness of God's love is meant by Christ to be

like His own. Alas! alas! is that our experience, Christian people? The

sun always shines on the rainless land of Egypt, except for a month or

two in the year. The contrast between the unclouded blue and continuous

light and heat there, and our murky skies and humid atmosphere, is like

the contrast between our broken and feeble consciousness of the shining

of the divine love and the uninterrupted glory of light and joy of

communion which poured on Christ's heart. But it is possible for us

indefinitely to approximate to such an experience; and the way by which

we reach it is that plain and simple one of accepting Christ's

declaration of the Father's name.

IV. And so, lastly, notice the indwelling Christ who makes our

participation in the divine love possible: And I in them.'

One may well say, How can it be that love should be transferred? How

can it be that the love of God to me shall be identical with the love

of God to Christ?' There is only one answer. If Christ dwells in me,

then God's love to Him falls upon me by no transference, but by my

incorporation into Him. And I would urge that this great truth of the

actual indwelling of Christ in the soul is no mere piece of rhetorical

exaggeration, nor a wild and enthusiastic way of putting the fact that

the influence of His teaching and the beauty of His example can sway

us; but it is a plain and absolute truth that the divine Christ can

come into and abide in the narrow room of our poor hearts. And if He

does this, then he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit'; and the

Christ in me receives the sunshine of the divine love. That does not

destroy, but heightens, my individuality. I am more and not less myself

because I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'

So, dear brethren! it all comes to this--we may each of us, if we will,

have Jesus Christ for Guest and Inhabitant in our hearts. If we have,

then, since God loves Him, He must love me who have Him within me, and

as long as God loves Christ He cannot cease to love me, nor can I cease

to be conscious of His love to me, and whatsoever gifts His love

bestows upon Jesus, pass over in measure, and partially, to myself.

Thus immortality, heaven, glory, all blessedness in heaven and earth,

are the fruit and crystallisation, so to speak, of that oneness with

Christ which is possible for us. And the conditions are simply that we

shall with joyful trust accept His declaration of the Father's name,

and see God manifest in Him; and welcome in our inmost hearts that

great Gospel. Then His prayer, and the travail of His soul, will reach

their end even in me, and the love wherewith the Father loved the Son

shall be in me,' and the Son Himself shall dwell in my heart.

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CHRIST AND HIS CAPTORS

As soon then as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward, and

fell to the ground. Then asked He them again, Whom seek ye? And they

said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am He:

if therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way: That the saying might

he fulfilled, which He spake, Of them which Thou gayest Me have I lost

none.'--JOHN xviii. 6-9.

This remarkable incident is narrated by John only. It fits in with the

purpose which he himself tells us governed his selection of the

incidents which he records. These things are written,' says he, near

the end of the Gospel, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Son of

God, and that, believing, ye might have life in His name.' The whole of

the peculiarities of the substance of John's Gospel are to be explained

on the two grounds that he was writing a supplement to, and not a

substitute for, or a correction of, the Gospels already in existence;

and that his special business was to narrate such facts and words as

set forth the glory of Christ as the Only Begotten of the Father.'

The incident before us is, as I think, one of these. The Evangelist

would have us see in it, as I gather from his manner of narrating it,

mainly three things. He emphasises that strange recoil of the would-be

captors before Christ's majestic, calm I am He'; that was a

manifestation of Christ's glory. He emphasises our Lord's patient

standing there, in the midst of the awe-struck crowd, and even inciting

them, as it would seem, to do the work for which they had come out;

that was a manifestation of the voluntariness of Christ's sufferings.

And He emphasises the self-forgetting care with which at that supreme

moment He steps between His faithless, weak friends and danger, with

the wonderful words, If ye seek Me, let these go their way'; to the

Evangelist that little incident is an illustration, on a very low

level, and in regard to a comparatively trivial matter, of the very

same principle by which salvation from all evil in time and in

eternity, is guaranteed to all that believe on Him:--

I. First, then, consider this remarkable, momentary manifestation of

our Lord's glory.

I am He!' When the Band were thus doubly assured by the traitor's kiss

and by His own confession, why did they not lay hands upon Him? There

He stood in the midst of them, alone, defenceless; there was nothing to

hinder their binding Him on the spot. Instead of that they recoil, and

fall in a huddled heap before Him. Some strange awe and terror, of

which they themselves could have given no account, was upon their

spirits. How came it about? Many things may have conspired to produce

it. I am by no means anxious to insist that this was a miracle. Things

of the same sort, though much less in degree, have been often enough

seen; when some innocent and illustrious victim has for a moment

paralysed the hands of his would-be captors and made them feel, though

it were but transiently, how awful goodness is.' There must have been

many in that band who had heard Him, though, in the uncertain light of

quivering moonbeams and smoking torches, they failed to recognise Him

till He spoke. There must have been many more who had heard of Him, and

many who suspected that they were about to lay hands on a holy man,

perhaps on a prophet. There must have been reluctant tools among the

inferiors, and no doubt some among the leaders whoso consciences needed

but a touch to be roused to action. To all, His calmness and dignity

would appeal, and the manifest freedom from fear or desire to flee

would tend to deepen the strange thoughts which began to stir in their

hearts.

But the impression which the narrative seems intended to leave, appears

to me to be of something more than this. It looks as if there were

something more than human in Christ's look and tone. It may have been

the same in kind as the ascendency which a pure and calm nature has

over rude and inferior ones. It may have been the same in kind as has

sometimes made the headsman on the scaffold pause before he struck, and

has bowed rude gaolers into converts before some grey-haired saint or

virgin martyr; yet the difference is so great in degree as practically

to become quite another thing. Though I do not want to insist upon any

miraculous' explanation of the cause of this incident, yet I would ask,

May it not be that here we see, perhaps apart from Christ's will

altogether, rising up for one moment to the surface, the indwelling

majesty which was always there?

We do not know the laws that regulated the dwelling of the Godhead,

bodily, within that human frame, but we do know that at one other time

there came upon His features a transfiguration, and over His very

garments a lustre which was not thrown upon them from without, but rose

up from within. And I am inclined to think that here, as there, though

under such widely different circumstances and to such various issues,

there was for a moment a little rending of the veil of His flesh, and

an emission of some flash of the brightness that always tabernacled

within Him; and that, therefore, just as Isaiah, when He saw the King

in His glory, said, Woe is me, for I am undone!' and just as Moses

could not look upon the Face, but could only see the back parts, so

here the one stray beam of manifest divinity that shot through the

crevice, as it were, for an instant, was enough to prostrate with a

strange awe even those rude and insensitive men. When He had said I am

He,' there was something that made them feel, This is One before whom

violence cowers abashed, and in whose presence impurity has to hide its

face.' I do not assert that this is the explanation of that panic

terror. I only ask, May it not be?

But whatever we may think was the reason, at all events the incident

brings out very strikingly the elevation and dignity of Christ, and the

powerful impressions made by His personality, even at such a time of

humiliation. This Evangelist is always careful to bring out the glory

of Christ, especially when that glory lies side by side with His

lowliness. The blending of these two is one of the remarkable features

in the New Testament portraiture of Jesus Christ. Wherever in our

Lord's life any incident indicates more emphatically than usual the

lowliness of His humiliation, there, by the side of it, you get

something that indicates the majesty of His glory. For instance, He is

born a weak infant, but angels herald His birth; He lies in a manger,

but a star hangs trembling above it, and leads sages from afar, with

their myrrh, and incense, and gold. He submits Himself to the baptism

of repentance, but the heavens open and a voice proclaims, This is My

beloved Son!' He sits wearied, on the stone coping of the well, and

craves for water from a peasant woman; but He gives her the Water of

Life. He lies down and sleeps, from pure exhaustion, in the stern of

the little fishing-boat, but He wakes to command the storm, and it is

still. He weeps beside the grave, but He flings His voice into its

inmost recesses, and the sheeted dead comes forth. He well-nigh faints

under the agony in the garden, but an angel from Heaven strengthens

Him. He stands a prisoner at a human bar, but He judges and condemns

His judges. He dies, and that hour of defeat is His hour of triumph,

and the union of shame and glory is most conspicuous in that hour when

on the Cross the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him.'

This strange blending of opposites--the glory in the lowliness, and the

abasement in the glory--is the keynote of this singular event. He will

be delivered into the hands of men.' Yes; but ere He is delivered He

pauses for an instant, and in that instant comes a flash above the

brightness of the noonday sun' to tell of the hidden glory.

Do not forget that we may well look upon that incident as a prophecy of

what shall be. As one of the suggestive, old commentators on this verse

says: He will say "I am He," again, a third time. What will He do

coming to reign, when He did this coming to die? And what will His

manifestation be as a Judge when this was the effect of the

manifestation as He went to be judged?' Every eye shall see Him'; and

they that loved not His appearing shall fall before Him when He cometh

to be our Judge; and shall call on the rocks and the hills to cover

them.

II. There is here, secondly, a manifestation of the voluntariness of

our Lord's suffering.

When that terrified mob recoiled from Him, why did He stand there so

patiently? The time was propitious for flight, if He had cared to flee.

He might have passed through the midst of them and gone His way.' as He

did once before, if He had chosen. He comes from the garden; there

shall be no difficulty in finding Him. He tells who He is; there shall

be no need for the traitor's kiss. He lays them low for a moment, but

He will not flee. When Peter draws his sword He rebukes his ill-advised

appeal to force, and then He holds out His hands and lets them bind

Him. It was not their fetters, but the cords of love' which held Him

prisoner. It was not their power, but His own pity which drew Him to

the judgment hall and the Cross.

Let us dwell upon that thought for a moment. The whole story of the

Gospels is constructed upon the principle, and illustrates the fact,

that our Lord's life, as our Lord's death, was a voluntary surrender of

Himself for man's sin, and that nothing led Him to, and fastened Him

on, the Cross but His own will. He willed to be born. He came into the

world' by His own choice. He took upon Him the form of a servant.' He

took part' of the children's flesh and blood.' His birth was His own

act, the first of the long series of the acts, by which for the sake of

the love which He bore us, He humbled Himself.' Step by step He

voluntarily journeyed towards the Cross, which stood clear before Him

from the very beginning as the necessary end, made necessary by His

love.

As we get nearer and nearer to the close of the history, we see more

and more distinctly that He willingly went towards the Cross, Take; for

instance, the account of the last portion of our Lord's life, and you

see in the whole of it a deliberate intention to precipitate the final

conflict. Hence the last journey to Jerusalem when His face was set,'

and His disciples followed Him amazed. Hence the studied publicity of

His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Hence the studied, growing severity

of His rebukes to the priests and rulers. The same impression is given,

though in a somewhat different way, by His momentary retreat from the

city and by the precautions taken against premature arrest, that He

might not die before the Passover. In both the hastening toward the

city and in the retreating from it, there is apparent the same design:

that He Himself shall lay down His life, and shall determine the how,

and the when, and the where as seems good to Him.

If we look at the act of death itself, Jesus did not die because He

must. It was not the nails of the Cross, the physical exhaustion, the

nervous shock of crucifixion that killed Him. He died because He would.

I have power to lay down My life,' He said, and I have power'--of

course--to take it again.' At that last moment, He was Lord and Master

of death when He bowed His head to death, and, if I might so say, He

summoned that grim servant with a Come!' and he came, and He set him

his task with a Do this!' and he did it. He was manifested as the Lord

of death, having its keys' in His hands, when He died upon the Cross.

Now I pray you to ask yourselves the question, if it be true that

Christ died because He would, why was it that He would die? If because

He chose, what was it that determined His choice? And there are but two

answers, which two are one. The divine motive that ruled His life is

doubly expressed: I must do the will of My Father,' and I must save the

world.'

The taunt that those Jewish rulers threw at Him had a deeper truth than

they dreamed, and was an encomium, and not a taunt. He saved

others'--yes, and therefore, Himself He cannot save.' He cannot,

because His choice and will to die are determined by His free love to

us and to all the world. His fixed will bore His body to the tree,' and

His love was the strong spring which kept His will fixed.

You and I have our share in these voluntary sufferings, and our place

in that loving heart which underwent them for us. Oh! should not that

thought speak to all our hearts, and bind us in grateful service and

lifelong surrender to Him who gave Himself for us; and must die because

He loved us all so much that He could not leave us unsaved?

III. We have, lastly, here, a symbol, or, perhaps, more accurately, an

instance, on a small scale, of Christ's self-sacrificing care for us.

His words: If ye seek Me, let these go their way,' sound more like the

command of a prince than the intercession of a prisoner. The calm

dignity of them strikes one just as much as the perfect

self-forgetfulness of them.

It was a very small matter which He was securing thereby. The Apostles

would have to die for Him some day, but they were not ready for it yet,

and so He casts the shield of His protection round them for a moment,

and interposes Himself between them and the band of soldiers in order

that their weakness may have a little more time to grow strong. And

though it was wrong and cowardly for them to forsake Him and flee, yet

these words of my text more than half gave them permission and warrant

for their departure: Let these go their way.'

Now John did not think that this small deliverance was all that Christ

meant by these great words: Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost

none!' He saw that it was one case, a very trifling one, a merely

transitory one, yet ruled by the same principles which are at work in

the immensely higher region to which the words properly refer. Of

course they have their proper fulfilment in the spiritual realm, and

are not fulfilled, in the highest sense, till all who have loved and

followed Christ are presented faultless before the Father in the home

above. But the little incident may be a result of the same cause as the

final deliverance is. A dew-drop is shaped by the same laws which mould

the mightiest of the planets. The old divines used to say that God was

greatest in the smallest things, and the self-sacrificing care of Jesus

Christ, as He gives Himself a prisoner that His disciples may go free,

comes from the same deep heart of pitying love, which led Him to die,

the just for the unjust.' It may then well stand for a partial

fulfilment of His mighty words, even though these wait for their

complete accomplishment till the hour when all the sheep are gathered

into the one fold, and no evil beasts, nor weary journeys, nor barren

pastures can harass them any more.

This trivial incident, then, becomes an exposition of highest truth.

Let us learn from such an use of such an event to look upon all common

and transitory circumstances as governed by the same loving hands, and

working to the same ends, as the most purely spiritual. The visible is

the veil which drapes the invisible, and clings so closely to it as to

reveal its outline. The common events of life are all parables to the

devout heart, which is the wise heart. They speak mystic meanings to

ears that can hear. The redeeming love of Jesus is proclaimed by every

mercy which perishes in the using; and all things should tell us of His

self-forgetting, self-sacrificing care.

Thus, then, we may see in that picture of our Lord's surrendering

Himself that His trembling disciples might go free, an emblem of what

He does for us, in regard to all our foes. He stands between us and

them, receives their arrows into His own bosom, and says, Let these go

their way.' God's law comes with its terrors, with its penalties, to us

who have broken it a thousand times. The consciousness of guilt and sin

threatens us all more or less, and with varying intensity in different

minds. The weariness of the world, the ills that flesh is heir to,' the

last grim enemy, Death, and that which lies beyond them all, ring you

round. My friends! what are you going to do in order to escape from

them? You are a sinful man, you have broken God's law. That law goes on

crashing its way and crushing down all that is opposed to it. You have

a weary life before you, however joyful it may sometimes be. Cares, and

troubles, and sorrows, and tears, and losses, and disappointments, and

hard duties that you will not be able to perform, and dark days in

which you will be able to see but very little light, are all certain to

come sooner or later; and the last moment will draw near when the King

of Terrors will be at your side; and beyond death there is a life of

retribution in which men reap the things that they have sown here. All

that is true, much of it is true about you at this moment, and it will

all be true some day. In view of that, what are you going to do?

I preach to you a Saviour who has endured all for us. As a mother might

fling herself out of the sledge that her child might escape the wolves

in full chase, here is One that comes and fronts all your foes, and

says to them, Let these go their way. Take Me.' By His stripes we are

healed.' On Him was laid the iniquity of us all.'

He died because He chose; He chose because He loved. His love had to

die in order that His death might be our life, and that in it we should

find our forgiveness and peace. He stands between our foes and us. No

evil can strike us unless it strike Him first. He takes into His own

heart the sharpest of all the darts which can pierce ours. He has borne

the guilt and punishment of a world's sin. These solemn penalties have

fallen upon Him that we, trusting in Him, may go our way,' and that

there may be no condemnation' to us if we are in Christ Jesus. And if

there be no condemnation, we can stand whatever other blows may fall

upon us. They are easier to bear, and their whole character is

different, when we know that Christ has borne them already. Two of the

three whom Christ protected in the garden died a martyr's death; but do

you not think that James bowed his neck to Herod's sword, and Peter let

them gird him and lead him to his cross, more joyfully and with a

different heart, when they thought of Him that had died before them?

The darkest prison cell will not be so very dark if we remember that

Christ has been there before us, and death itself will be softened into

sleep because our Lord has died. If therefore,' says He, to the whole

pack of evils baying round us, with their cruel eyes and their hungry

mouths, ye seek Me, let these go their way.' So, brother, if you will

fix your trust, as a poor, sinful soul, on that dear Christ, and get

behind Him, and put Him between you and your enemies, then, in time and

in eternity, that saying will be fulfilled in you which He spake, Of

them which Thou gavest Me, have I lost none.'

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JESUS BEFORE CAIAPHAS

And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that

disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into

the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without.

Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high

priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.

Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also

one of this Man's disciples? He saith, I am not. And the servants and

officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold:

and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed

himself. The high priest then asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His

doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever

taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always

resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou Me? ask them

which heard Me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I

said. And when He had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by

struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest Thou the high

priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of

the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me? Now Annas had sent Him

bound unto Caiaphas the high priest. And Simon Peter stood and warmed

himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of His

disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the

high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not

I see thee in the garden with Him? Peter then denied again: and

immediately the cock crew.'--JOHN xviii. 15-27.

The last verses of the preceding passage belong properly to this one,

for they tell us that Jesus was first' brought before Annas, a fact

which we owe to John only. Annas himself and his five sons held the

high-priesthood in succession. To the sons has to be added Caiaphas,

who, as we learn from John only, was Annas' son-in-law, and so one of

the family party. That Jesus should have been taken to him, though he

held no office at the time, shows who pulled the strings in the

Sanhedrim. The reference to Caiaphas in verse 14 seems intended to

suggest what sort of a trial might be expected, presided over by such a

man. But verse 15 tells us that Jesus entered in, accompanied by

another disciple,' to the court,' not, as we should have expected, of

Annas, but of the high priest,' who, by the testimony of verse 13, can

be no one but Caiaphas. How came that about? Apparently, because Annas

had apartments in the high-priest's official residence. As he obviously

exercised the influence through his sons and son-in-law, who

successively held the office, it was very natural that he should be a

fixture in the palace.

What John's connection was with this veteran intriguer (assuming that

John was that other disciple') we do not know. Probably it was some

family bond that united two such antipathetic natures. At all events,

the Apostle's acquaintance with the judge so far condoned his

discipleship to the criminal, that the doors of the audience chamber

were open to him, though he was known as one of them.'

So he and poor Peter were parted, and the latter left shivering outside

in the grey of the morning. John had not missed him at first, for he

would be too much absorbed in watching Jesus to have thoughts to spare

for Peter, and would conclude that he was following him; but, when he

did miss him, like a brave man he ran the risk of being observed, and

went for him. The sharp-witted porteress, whose business it was to

judge applicants for entrance by a quick glance, at once inferred that

Peter also' was one of this man's disciples. Her also' shows that she

knew John to be one; and her this man' shows that either she did not

know Jesus' name, or thought Him too far beneath her to be named by

her! The time during which Peter had been left outside alone, repenting

now of, and alarmed for what might happen to him on account of, his

ill-aimed blow at Malchus, and feeling the nipping cold, had taken all

his courage out of him. The one thing he wished was to slip in

unnoticed, and so the first denial came to his lips as rashly as many

another word had come in old days. He does not seem to have remained

with John, who probably went up to the upper end of the hall, where the

examination was going on, while Peter, not having the entree and very

much terrified as well as miserable, stayed at the lower end, where the

understrappers were making themselves comfortable round a charcoal

fire, and paying no attention to the proceedings at the other end. He

seemed to be as indifferent as they were, and to be intent only on

getting himself warmed. But what surges of emotion would be tossing in

his heart, which yet he was trying to hide under the mask of being an

unconcerned spectator, like the others!

The examination of our Lord was conducted by the high priest,' by which

title John must mean Caiaphas, as he has just emphatically noted that

he then filled the office. But how is that to be reconciled with the

statement that Jesus was taken to Annas? Apparently by supposing that,

though Annas was present, Caiaphas was spokesman. But did not a formal

trial before Caiaphas follow, and does not John tell us (verse 24)

that, after the first examination, Annas sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas?

Yes. And are these things compatible with this account of an

examination conducted by the latter? Yes, if we remember that flagrant

wresting of justice marked the whole proceedings. The condemnation of

Jesus was a judicial murder, in which the highest court of the Jews

decreed iniquity by a law'; and it was of a piece with all the rest

that he, who was to pose as an impartial judge presently, should, in

the spirit of a partisan, conduct this preliminary inquiry. Observe

that no sentence was pronounced in the case at this stage. This was not

a court at all. What was it? An attempt to entrap the prisoner into

admissions which might be used against Him in the court to be held

presently. The rulers had Jesus in their hands, and they did not know

what to do with Him now that they had Him. They were at a loss to know

what His indictment was to be. To kill Him was the only thing on which

they had made up their minds; the pretext had yet to be found, and so

they tried to get Him to say something which would serve their purpose.

The high priest therefore asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His

teaching'! If they did not know about either, why had they arrested

Him? Cunning outwits itself, and falls into the pit it digs for the

innocent. Jesus passed by the question as to His disciples unnoticed,

and by His calm answer as to His teaching showed that He saw the snare.

He reduced Caiaphas and Annas to perpetrating plain injustice, or to

letting Him go free. Elementary fair play to a prisoner prescribes that

he should be accused of some crime by some one, and not that he should

furnish his judges with materials for his own indictment. Why askest

thou Me? ask them that have heard Me,' is unanswerable, except by such

an answer as the officious servant' gave--a blow and a violent speech.

But Christ's words reach far beyond the momentary purpose; they contain

a wide truth. His teaching loves the daylight. There are no muttered

oracles, no whispered secrets for the initiated, no double voice, one

for the multitude, and another for the adepts. All is above-board, and

all is spoken openly to the world.' Christianity has no cliques or

coteries, nothing sectional, nothing reserved. It is for mankind, for

all mankind, all for mankind. True, there are depths in it; true, the

secrets which Jesus can only speak to loving ears in secret are His

sweetest words, but they are spoken in the ear' that they may be

proclaimed on the housetops.'

The high-priest is silent, for there was nothing that he could say to

so undeniable a demand, and he had no witnesses ready. How many since

his day have treated Jesus as he treated Him--condemned Him or rejected

Him without reason, and then looked about for reasons to justify their

attitude, or even sought to make Him condemn Himself!

An unjust judge breeds insolent underlings, and if everything else

fails, blows and foul words cover defeat, and treat calm assertion of

right as impertinence to high-placed officials. Caiaphas degraded his

own dignity more than any words of a prisoner could degrade it.

Our Lord's answer reviled not again.' It is meek in majesty and

majestic in meekness. Patient endurance is not forbidden to remonstrate

with insolent injustice, if only its remonstrance bears no heat of

personal anger in it. But Jesus was not so much vindicating His words

to Caiaphas in saying, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the

evil,' as reiterating the challenge for witnesses.' He brands the

injustice of Caiaphas, while meekly rebuking the brutality of his

servant. Master and man were alike in smiting Him for words of which

they could not prove the evil.

There was obviously nothing to be gained by further examination. No

crime had been alleged, much less established; therefore Jesus ought to

have been let go. But Annas treated Him as a criminal, and handed Him

over bound,' to be formally tried before the man who had just been

foiled in his attempt to play the inquisitor. What a hideous mockery of

legal procedure! How well the pair, father-in-law and son-in-law,

understood each other! What a confession of a foregone conclusion,

evidence or no evidence, in shackling Jesus as a malefactor! And it was

all done in the name of religion! and perhaps the couple of priests did

not know that they were hypocrites, but really thought that they were

doing God service.'

John's account of Peter's denials rises to a climax of peril and of

keenness of suspicion. The unnamed persons who put the second question

must have had their suspicions roused by something in his manner as he

stood by the glinting fire, perhaps by agitation too great to be

concealed. The third question was put by a more dangerous person still,

who not only recognised Peter's features as the firelight fitfully

showed them, but had a personal ground of hostility in his relationship

to Malchus.

John lovingly spares telling of the oaths and curses accompanying the

denials, but dares not spare the narration of the fact. It has too

precious lessons of humility, of self-distrust, of the possibility of

genuine love being overborne by sudden and strong temptation, to be

omitted. And the sequel of the denials has yet more precious teaching,

which has brought balm to many a contrite heart, conscious of having

been untrue to its deepest love. For the sound of the cock-crow, and

the look from the Lord as He was led away bound past the place where

Peter stood, brought him back to himself, and brought tears to his

eyes, which were sweet as well as bitter. On the resurrection morning

the risen Lord sent the message of forgiveness and special love to the

broken-hearted Apostle, when He said, Go, tell My disciples and Peter,'

and on that day there was an interview of which Paul knew (1 Cor. xv.

5), but the details of which were apparently communicated by the

Apostle to none of his brethren. The denier who weeps is taken to

Christ's heart, and in sacred secrecy has His forgiveness freely given,

though, before he can be restored to his public office, he must, by his

threefold public avowal of love, efface his threefold denial. We may

say, Thou knowest that I love thee,' even if we have said, I know Him

not,' and come nearer to Jesus, by reason of the experience of His

pardoning love, than we were before we fell.

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ART THOU A KING?

Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was

early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they

should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. Pilate then

went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this

Man? They answered and said unto him, If He were not a malefactor, we

would not have delivered Him up unto thee. Then said Pilate unto them,

Take ye Him, and judge Him according to your law. The Jews therefore

said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: That

the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spake, signifying what

death He should die. Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again,

and called Jesus, and said unto Him, Art Thou the King of the Jews?

Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others

tell it thee of Me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and

the chief priests have delivered Thee unto me: what hast Thou done?

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of

this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be

delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence. Pilate

therefore said unto Him, Art Thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou

sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause

came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every

one that is of the truth heareth My voice. Pilate saith unto Him, What

is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews,

and saith unto them, I find in Him no fault at all. But ye have a

custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye

therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried they

all again, saying, Not this Man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a

robber.'--JOHN xviii. 28-40.

John evidently intends to supplement the synoptic Gospels' account. He

tells of Christ's appearance before Annas, but passes by that before

Caiaphas, though he shows his knowledge of it. Similarly he touches

lightly on the public hearing before Pilate, but gives us in detail the

private conversation in this section, which he alone records. We may

suppose that he was present at both the hearing before Annas and the

interview within the palace between Jesus and Herod, for he would not

be deterred from entering, as the Jews were, and there seems to have

been no other impediment in the way. The passage has three stages--the

fencing between the Sanhedrists and Pilate, the good confession before

Pontius Pilate,' and the preference of Barabbas to Jesus.

I. The passage of arms between the priests and the governor. It was

early,' probably before 6 A.M. A hurried meeting of the Sanhedrim had

condemned Jesus to death, and the next thing was to get the Roman

authority to carry out the sentence. The necessity of appeal to it was

a bitter pill, but it had to be swallowed, for the right of capital

punishment had been withdrawn. A religious' scruple, too, stood in the

way--very characteristic of such formalists. Killing an innocent man

would not in the least defile them, or unfit for eating the passover,

but to go into a house that had not been purged of leaven,' and was

further unclean as the residence of a Gentile, though he was the

governor, that would stain their consciences--a singular scale of

magnitude, which saw no sin in condemning Jesus, and great sin in going

into Pilate's palace! Perhaps some of our conventional sins are of a

like sort.

Pilate was, probably, not over-pleased at being roused so early, nor at

having to defer to a scruple which would to him look like insolence;

and through all his bearing to the Sanhedrim a certain irritation shows

itself, which sometimes flashes out in sarcasm, but is for the most

part kept down. His first question is, perhaps, not so simple as it

looks, for he must have had some previous knowledge of the case, since

Roman soldiers had been used for the arrest. But, clearly, those who

brought him a prisoner were bound to be the prosecutors.

Whether or not Pilate knew that his question was embarrassing, the

rulers felt it so. Why did they not wish to formulate a charge? Partly

from pride. They hugged the delusion that their court was competent to

condemn, and wanted, as we all often do, to shut their eyes to a plain

fact, as if ignoring it annihilated it. Partly because the charge on

which they had condemned Jesus--that of blasphemy in calling Himself

the Son of God'--was not a crime known to Roman law, and to allege it

would probably have ended in the whole matter being scornfully

dismissed. So they stood on their dignity and tried to bluster. We have

condemned Him; that is enough. We look to you to carry out the sentence

at our bidding.' So the ecclesiastical authority' has often said to the

secular arm' since then, and unfortunately the civil authority has not

always been as wise as Pilate was.

He saw an opening to get rid of the whole matter, and with just a faint

flavour of irony suggests that, as they have a law'--which he, no

doubt, thought of as a very barbarous code--they had better go by it,

and punish as well as condemn. That sarcastic proposal compelled them

to acknowledge their subjection. Pilate had given the reins the least

touch, but enough to make them feel the bit; and though it went sore

against the grain, they will own their master rather than lose their

victim. So their reluctant lips say, It is not lawful for us.' Pilate

has brought them on their knees at last, and they forget their dignity,

and own the truth. Malicious hatred will eat any amount of dirt and

humiliation to gain its ends, especially if it calls itself religious

zeal.

John sees in the issue of this first round in the duel between Pilate

and the rulers the sequence of events which brought about the

fulfilment of our Lord's prediction of His crucifixion, since that was

not a Jewish mode of execution. This encounter of keen wits becomes

tragical and awful when we remember Who it was that these men were

wrangling about.

II. We have Jesus and Pilate; the good confession,' and the indifferent

answer. We must suppose that, unwillingly, the rulers had brought the

accusation that Jesus had attempted rebellion against Rome. John omits

that, because he takes it for granted that it is known. It is implied

in the conversation which now ensued. We must note as remarkable that

Pilate does not conduct his first examination in the presence of the

rulers, but has Jesus brought to him in the palace. Perhaps he simply

wished to annoy the accusers, but more probably his Roman sense of

justice combined with his wish to assert his authority, and perhaps

with a suspicion that there was something strange about the whole

matter--and not least strange that the Sanhedrim, who were not

enthusiastic supporters of Rome, should all at once display such

loyalty--to make him wish to have the prisoner by himself, and try to

fathom the business. With Roman directness he went straight to the

point: Art Thou the King of the Jews, as they have been saying?' There

is emphasis on Thou'--the emphasis which a practical Roman official

would be likely to put as he looked at the weak, wearied, evidently

poor and helpless man bound before him. There is almost a touch of pity

in the question, and certainly the beginning of the conviction that

this was not a very formidable rival to Caesar.

The answer to be given depended on the sense in which Pilate asked the

question, to bring out which is the object of Christ's question in

reply. If Pilate was asking of himself, then what he meant by a king'

was one of earth's monarchs after the emperor's pattern, and the answer

would be No.' If he was repeating a Jewish charge, then, a king' might

mean the prophetic King of Israel, who was no rival of earthly

monarchs, and the answer would be Yes,' but that Yes' would give Pilate

no more reason to crucify Him than the No' would have given.

Pilate is getting tired of fencing, and impatiently answers, with true

Roman contempt for subject-people's thoughts as well as their weapons.

I . . . a Jew?' is said with a curl of the firm lips. He points to his

informants, Thine own nation and the chief priests,' and does not say

that their surrender of a would-be leader in a war of independence

struck him as suspicious. But he brushes aside the cobwebs which he

felt were being spun round him, and comes to the point, What hast Thou

done?' He is supremely indifferent to ideas and vagaries of

enthusiasts. This poor man before him may call Himself anything He

chooses, but his only concern is with overt acts. Strange to ask the

Prisoner what He had done! It had been well for Pilate if he had held

fast by that question, and based his judgment resolutely on its answer!

He kept asking it all through the case, he never succeeded in getting

an answer; he was convinced that Jesus had done nothing worthy of

death, and yet fear, and a wish to curry favour with the rulers, drove

him to stain the judge's robe with innocent blood, from which he vainly

sought to cleanse his hands.

Our Lord's double answer claims a kingdom, but first shows what it is

not, and then what it is. It is not of this world,' though it is in

this world, being established and developed here, but having nothing in

common with earthly dominions, nor being advanced by their weapons or

methods. Pilate could convince himself that this kingdom' bore no

menace to Rome, from the fact that no resistance had been offered to

Christ's capture. But the principle involved in these great words goes

far beyond their immediate application. It forbids Christ's servants'

to assimilate His kingdom to the world, or to use worldly powers as the

means for the kingdom's advancement. The history of the Church has

sadly proved how hard it is for Christian men to learn the lesson, and

how fatal to the energy and purity of the Church the forgetfulness of

it has been. The temptation to such assimilation besets all organised

Christianity, and is as strong to-day as when Constantine gave the

Church the paralysing gift of establishing' it as a kingdom of this

world.'

Pilate did pick out of this saying an increased certainty that he had

nothing to fear from this strange King'; and half-amused contempt for a

dreamer, and half-pitying wonder at such lofty claims from such a

helpless enthusiast, prompted his question, Art Thou a king then?' One

can fancy the scornful emphasis on that Thou.' and can understand how

grotesquely absurd the notion of his prisoner's being a king must have

seemed.

Having made clear part of the sense in which the avowal was to be

taken, our Lord answered plainly Yes.' Thus before the high-priest, He

declared Himself to be the Son of God, and before Pilate He claimed to

be King, at each tribunal putting forward the claim which each was

competent to examine--and, alas! at each meeting similar levity and

refusal to inquire seriously into the validity of the claim. The solemn

revelation to Pilate of the true nature of His kingdom and of Himself

the King fell on careless ears. A deeper mystery than Pilate dreamed of

lay beneath the double designation of His origin; for He not only had

been born' like other men, but had come into the world,' having come

forth from the Father,' and having been before He was born. It was

scarcely possible that Pilate should apprehend the meaning of that

duplication, but some vague impression of a mysterious personality

might reach him, and Jesus would not have fully expressed His own

consciousness if He had simply said, I was born.' Let us see that we

keep firm hold of all which that utterance implies and declares.

The end of the Incarnation is to bear witness to the truth.' That

witness is the one weapon by which Christ's kingdom is established.

That witness is not given by words only, precious as these are, but by

deeds which are more than words. These witnessing deeds are not

complete till Calvary and the empty grave and Olivet have witnessed at

once to the perfect incarnation of divine love, to the perfect

Sacrifice for the world's sin, to the Victor over death, and to the

opening of heaven to all believers. Jesus is the faithful and true

Witness,' as John calls Him, not without reminiscences of this passage,

just because He is the First-begotten of the dead.' As here He told

Pilate that He was a king,' because a witness,' so John, in the passage

referred to, bases His being Prince of the kings of the earth' on the

same fact.

How little Pilate knew that he was standing at the very crisis of his

fate! A yielding to the impression that was slightly touching his heart

and conscience, and he, too, might have heard' Christ's voice. But he

was not of the truth,' though he might have been if he had willed, and

so the words were wind to him, and he brushed aside all the mist, as he

thought it, with the light question, which summed up a Roman man of the

world's indifference to ideas, and belief in solid facts like legions

and swords. What is truth?' may be the cry of a seeking soul, or the

sneer of a confirmed sceptic, or the shrug of indifference of the

practical man.'

It was the last in Pilate's case, as is shown by his not waiting for an

answer, but ending the conversation with it as a last shot. It meant,

too, that he felt quite certain that this man, with his high-strained,

unpractical talk about a kingdom resting on such a filmy nothing, was

absolutely harmless. Therefore the only just thing for him to have done

was to have gone out to the impatient crowd and said so, and flatly

refused to do the dirty work of the priests for them, by killing an

innocent man. But he was too cowardly for that, and, no doubt, thought

that the murder of one poor Jew was a small price to pay for popularity

with his troublesome subjects. Still, like all weak men, he was not

easy in his conscience, and made a futile attempt to get the right

thing done, and yet not to suffer for doing it. The rejection of

Barabbas is touched very lightly by John, and must be left unnoticed

here. The great contribution to our knowledge which John makes is this

private interview between the King who reigns by the truth, and the

representative of earthly rule, based on arms and worldly forces.

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JESUS SENTENCED

Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged Him. And the soldiers

platted a crown of thorns, and put it on His head, and they put on Him

a purple robe. And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote Him

with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto

them, Behold, I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no

fault in Him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and

the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the Man! When the

chief priests therefore and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying,

Crucify Him, crucify Him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye Him, and

crucify Him: for I find no fault in Him. The Jews answered him, We have

a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son

of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more

afraid; And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus,

Whence art Thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto

Him, Speakest Thou not unto me I knowest Thou not that I have power to

crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee? Jesus answered, Thou

couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee

from above: therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater

sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release Him: but the Jews

cried out, saying, If thou let this Man go, thou art not Caesar's

friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When

Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat

down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but

in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover,

and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!

But they cried out, Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him! Pilate

saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered,

We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he Him therefore unto them

to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led Him away.'--JOHN xix.

1-16.

The struggle between the vacillation of Pilate and the fixed malignity

of the rulers is the principal theme of this fragment of Christ's

judicial trial. He Himself is passive and all but silent, speaking only

one sentence of calm rebuke. The frequent changes of scene from within

to without the praetorium indicate the steps in the struggle, and

vividly reflect the irresolution of Pilate. These changes may help to

mark the stages in the narrative.

I. The cruelties and indignities in verses 1-3 were inflicted within

the palace,' to which Pilate, with his prisoner, had returned after the

popular vote for Barabbas. John makes that choice of the robber the

reason for the scourging of Jesus. His thought seems to be that Pilate,

having failed in his attempt to get rid of the whole difficulty by

releasing Jesus, according to the custom,' ordered the scourging, in

hope that the lighter punishment might satisfy the turbulent crowd,

whom he wished to humour, while, if possible, saving their victim. It

was the expedient of a weak and cynical nature, and, like all weak

attempts at compromise between right and wrong, only emboldened the

hatred which it was meant to appease. If by clamour the rulers had

succeeded in getting Pilate to scourge a man whom he thought innocent,

they might well hope to get him to crucify, if they clamoured loudly

and long enough.

One attitude only befitted Pilate, since he did not in the least

believe that Jesus threatened the Roman supremacy; namely, to set Him

at liberty, and let the disappointed rulers growl like wild beasts

robbed of their prey. But he did not care enough about a single

half-crazy Jewish peasant to imperil his standing well with his awkward

subjects, for the sake of righteousness. The one good which Rome could

give to its vassal nations was inflexible justice and a sovereign law;

but in Pilate's action there was not even the pretence of legality.

Tricks and expedients run through it all, and never once does he say,

This is the law, this is justice, and by it I stand or fall.

The cruel scourging, which, in Roman hands, was a much more severe

punishment than the Jewish beating with rods' and often ended in death,

was inflicted on the silent, unresisting Christ, not because His judge

thought that it was deserved, but to please accusers whose charge he

knew to be absurd. The underlings naturally followed their betters'

example, and after they had executed Pilate's orders to scourge,

covered the bleeding wounds with some robe, perhaps ragged, but of the

royal colour, and crushed the twisted wreath of thorn-branch down on

the brows, to make fresh wounds there. The jest of crowning such a

poor, helpless creature as Jesus seemed to them, was exactly on the

level of such rude natures, and would be the more exquisite to them

because it was double-barrelled, and insulted the nation as well as the

King.' They came in a string, as the tense of the original word

suggests, and offered their mock reverence. But that sport became tame

after a little, and mockery passed into violence, as it always does in

such natures. These rough legionaries were cruel and brutal, and they

were unconscious witnesses to His Kingship as founded on suffering; but

they were innocent as compared with the polished gentleman on the

judgment-seat who prostituted justice, and the learned Pharisees

outside who were howling for blood.

II. In verses 4-8 the scene changes again to without the palace, and

shows us Pilate trying another expedient, equally in vain. The

hesitating governor has no chance with the resolute, rooted hate of the

rulers. Jesus silently and unresistingly follows Pilate from the hall,

still wearing the mockery of royal pomp. Pilate had calculated that the

sight of Him in such guise, and bleeding from the lash, might turn hate

into contempt, and perhaps give a touch of pity. Behold the man!' as he

meant it, was as if he had said, Is this poor, bruised, spiritless

sufferer worth hate or fear? Does He look like a King or a dangerous

enemy?' Pilate for once drops the scoff of calling Him their King, and

seeks to conciliate and move to pity. The profound meanings which later

ages have delighted to find in his words, however warrantable, are no

part of their design as spoken, and we gain a better lesson from the

scene by keeping close to the thoughts of the actors. What a contrast

between the vacillation of the governor, on the one hand, afraid to do

right and reluctant to do wrong, and the dogged malignity of the rulers

and their tools on the other, and the calm, meek endurance of the

silent Christ, knowing all their thoughts, pitying all, and fixed in

loving resolve, even firmer than the rulers' hate, to bear the utmost,

that He might save a world!

Some pity may have stirred in the crowd, but the priests and their

immediate dependants silenced it by their yell of fresh hate at the

sight of the prisoner. Note how John gives the very impression of the

fierce, brief roar, like that of wild beasts for their prey, by his

Crucify, crucify!' without addition of the person. Pilate lost patience

at last, and angrily and half seriously gives permission to them to

take the law into their own hands. He really means, I will not be your

tool, and if my conviction of "the Man's" innocence is to be of no

account, you must punish Him; for I will not.' How far he meant to

abdicate authority, and how far he was launching sarcasms, it is

difficult to say. Throughout he is sarcastic, and thereby indicates his

weakness, indemnifying himself for being thwarted by sneers which sit

so ill on authority.

But the offer, or sarcasm, whichever it was, missed fire, as the appeal

to pity had done, and only led to the production of a new weapon. In

their frantic determination to compass Jesus' death, the rulers

hesitate at no degradation; and now they adduced the charge of

blasphemy, and were ready to make a heathen the judge. To ask a Roman

governor to execute their law on a religious offender, was to drag

their national prerogative in the mud. But formal religionists,

inflamed by religious animosity, are often the degraders of religion

for the gratification of their hatred. They are poor preservers of the

Church who call on the secular arm to execute their laws.' Rome went a

long way in letting subject peoples keep their institutions; but it was

too much to expect Pilate to be the hangman for these furious priests,

on a charge scarcely intelligible to him.

What was Jesus doing while all this hell of wickedness and fury boiled

round Him? Standing there, passive and dumb, as a sheep before her

shearers,' Himself is the least conspicuous figure in the history of

His own trial. In silent communion with the Father, in silent

submission to His murderers, in silent pity for us, in silent

contemplation of the joy that was set before Him,' He waits on their

will.

III. Once more the scene changes to the interior of the praetorium (vs.

9-11). The rulers' words stirred a deepened awe in Pilate. He was the

more afraid'; then he had been already afraid. His wife's dream, the

impression already produced by the person of Jesus, had touched him

more deeply than probably he himself was aware of; and now this charge

that Jesus had made Himself the Son of God' shook him. What if this

strange man were in some sense a messenger of the gods? Had he been

scourging one sent from them? Sceptical he probably was, and therefore

superstitious; and half-forgotten and disbelieved stories of gods who

had come down in the likeness of men' would swim up in his memory. If

this Man were such, His strange demeanour would be explained. Therefore

he carried Jesus in again, and, not now as judge, sought to hear from

His own lips His version of the alleged claim.

Why did not Jesus answer such a question? His silence was answer; but,

besides that, Pilate had not received as he ought what Jesus had

already declared to him as to His kingdom and His relation to the

truth,' and careless turning away from Christ's earlier words is

righteously and necessarily punished by subsequent silence, if the same

disposition remains. That it did remain, Christ's silence is proof. Had

there been any use in answering, Pilate would not have asked in vain.

If Jesus was silent, we may be sure that He who sees all hearts and

responds to all true desires was so, because He knew that it was best

to say nothing. The question of His origin had nothing to do with

Pilate's duty then, which turned, not on whence Jesus had come, but on

what Pilate believed Him to have done, or not to have done. He who will

not do the plain duty of the moment has little chance of an answer to

his questions about such high matters.

The shallow character of the governor's awe and interest is clearly

seen from the immediate change of tone to arrogant reminder of his

absolute authority. To me dost Thou not speak?' The pride of offended

dignity peeps out there. He has forgotten that a moment since he half

suspected that the prisoner, whom he now seeks to terrify with the

cross, and to allure with deliverance, was perhaps come from some misty

heaven. Was that a temper which would have received Christ's answer to

his question?

But one thing he might be made to perceive, and therefore Jesus broke

silence for the only time in this section, and almost the only time

before Pilate. He reads the arrogant Roman the lesson which he and all

his tribe in all lands and ages need--that their power is derived from

God, therefore in its foundation legitimate, and in its exercise to be

guided by His will and used for His purposes. It was God who had

brought the Roman eagles, with their ravening beaks and strong claws,

to the Holy City. Pilate was right in exercising jurisdiction over

Jesus. Let him see that he exercised justice, and let him remember that

the power which he boasted that he had' was given.' The truth as to the

source of power made the guilt of Caiaphas or of the rulers the

greater, inasmuch as they had neglected the duties to which they had

been appointed, and by handing over Jesus on a charge which they

themselves should have searched out, had been guilty of theocratic

felony.' This sudden flash of bold rebuke, reminding Pilate of his

dependence, and charging him with the lesser but yet real sin,' went

deeper than any answer to his question would have done, and spurred him

to more earnest effort, as John points out. He sought to release Him,'

as if formerly he had been rather simply unwilling to condemn than

anxious to deliver.

IV. So the scene changes again to outside. Pilate went out alone,

leaving Jesus within, and was met before he had time, as would appear,

to speak, by the final irresistible weapon which the rulers had kept in

reserve. An accusation of treason was only too certain to be listened

to by the suspicious tyrant who was then Emperor, especially if brought

by the authorities of a subject nation. Many a provincial governor had

had but a short shrift in such a case, and Pilate knew that he was a

ruined man if these implacable zealots howling before him went to

Tiberius with such a charge. So the die was cast. With rage in his

heart, no doubt, and knowing that he was sacrificing innocent blood' to

save himself, he turned away from the victorious mob, apparently in

silence, and brought Jesus out once more. He had no more words to say

to his prisoner. Nothing remained but the formal act of sentence, for

which he seated himself, with a poor assumption of dignity, yet feeling

all the while, no doubt, what a contemptible surrender he was making.

Judgment-seats and mosaic pavements do not go far to secure reverence

for a judge who is no better than an assassin, killing an innocent man

to secure his own ends. Pilate's sentence fell most heavily on himself.

If the judge is condemned when the guilty is acquitted,' he is tenfold

condemned when the innocent is sentenced.

Pilate returned to his sarcastic mood when he returned to his

injustice, and found some satisfaction in his old jeer, your King.' But

the passion of hatred was too much in earnest to be turned or even

affected by such poor scoffs, and the only answer was the renewed roar

of the mob, which had murder in its tone. The repetition of the

governor's taunt, Shall I crucify your King?' brought out the answer in

which the rulers of the nation in their fury blindly flung away their

prerogative. It is no accident that it was the chief priests' who

answered, We have no king but Caesar.' Driven by hate, they

deliberately disown their Messianic hope, and repudiate their national

glory. They who will not have Christ have to bow to a tyrant. Rebellion

against Him brings slavery.

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AN EYE-WITNESS'S ACCOUNT OF THE CRUCIFIXION

And He bearing His cross went forth into a place called the place of a

skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified

Him, and two other with Him, on either side one, and Jesus in the

midst. And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the

writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then

read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh

to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then

said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of

the Jews; but that He said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered,

What I have written I have written. Then the soldiers, when they had

crucified Jesus, took His garments, and made four parts, to every

soldier a part; and also His coat: now the coat was without seam, woven

from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us

not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the

scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted My raiment among

them, and for My vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the

soldiers did. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and his

mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When

Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He

loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold Thy Son! Then saith He

to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple

took her unto his own home. After this, Jesus knowing that all things

were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I

thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a

spunge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished:

and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.'--JOHN xix. 17-30.

In great and small matters John's account adds much to the narrative of

the crucifixion. He alone tells of the attempt to have the title on the

Cross altered, of the tender entrusting of the Virgin to his care, and

of the two words' I thirst' and It is finished.' He gives details which

had been burned into his memory, such as Christ's position in the

midst' of the two robbers, and the jar of vinegar' standing by the

crosses. He says little about the act of fixing Jesus to the Cross, but

enlarges what the other Evangelists tell as to the soldiers casting

lots.' He had heard what they said to one another. He alone distinctly

tells that when He went forth, Jesus was bearing the Cross which

afterwards Simon of Cyrene had to carry, probably because our Lord's

strength failed.

Who appointed the two robbers to be crucified at the same time? Not the

rulers, who had no such power but probably Pilate, as one more shaft of

sarcasm which was all the sharper both because it seemed to put Jesus

in the same class as they, and because they were of the same class as

the man of the Jews' choice, Barabbas, and possibly were two of his

gang. Jesus was in the midst,' where He always is, completely

identified with the transgressors, but central to all things and all

men. As He was in the midst on the Cross, with a penitent on one hand

and a rejecter on the other, He is still in the midst of humanity, and

His judgment-seat will be as central as His Cross was.

All the Evangelists give the title written over the Cross, but John

alone tells that it was Pilate's malicious invention. He thought that

he was having a final fling at the priests, and little knew how truly

his title, which was meant as a bitter jest, was a fact. He had it put

into the three tongues in use--Hebrew,' the national tongue; Greek,'

the common medium of intercourse between varying nationalities; and

Latin' the official language. He did not know that he was proclaiming

the universal dominion of Jesus, and prophesying that wisdom as

represented by Greece, law and imperial power as represented by Rome,

and all previous revelation as represented by Israel, would yet bow

before the Crucified, and recognise that His Cross was His throne.

The high-priests' winced, and would fain have had the title altered.

Their wish once more denied Jesus, and added to their condemnation, but

it did not move Pilate. It would have been well for him if he had been

as firm in carrying out his convictions of justice as in abiding by his

bitter jest. He was obstinate in the wrong place, partly because he was

angry with the rulers, and partly to recover his self-respect, which

had been damaged by his vacillation. But his stiff-necked speech had a

more tragic meaning than he knew, for what he had written' on his own

life-page on that day could never be erased, and will confront him. We

are all writing an imperishable record, and we shall have to read it

out hereafter, and acknowledge our handwriting.

John next sets in strong contrast the two groups round the Cross--the

stolid soldiers and the sad friends. The four legionaries went through

their work as a very ordinary piece of military duty. They were well

accustomed to crucify rebel Jews, and saw no difference between these

three and former prisoners. They watched the pangs without a touch of

pity, and only wished that death might come soon, and let them get back

to their barracks. How blind men may be to what they are gazing at! If

knowledge measures guilt, how slight the culpability of the soldiers!

They were scarcely more guilty than the mallet and nails which they

used. The Sufferer's clothes were their perquisite, and their division

was conducted on cool business principles, and with utter disregard of

the solemn nearness of death. Could callous indifference go further

than to cast lots for the robe at the very foot of the Cross?

But the thing that most concerns us here is that Jesus submitted to

that extremity of shame and humiliation, and hung there naked for all

these hours, gazed on, while the light lasted, by a mocking crowd. He

had set the perfect Pattern of lowly self-abnegation when, amid the

disciples in the upper room, He had laid aside His garments,' but now

He humbles Himself yet more, being clothed only with shame.' Therefore

should we clothe Him with hearts' love. Therefore God has clothed Him

with the robes of imperial majesty.

Another point emphasised by John is the fulfilment of prophecy in this

act. The seamless robe, probably woven by loving hands, perhaps by some

of the weeping women who stood there, was too valuable to divide, and

it would be a moment's pastime to cast lots for it. John saw, in the

expedient naturally suggested to four rough men, who all wanted the

robe but did not want to quarrel over it, a fulfilment of the cry of

the ancient sufferer, who had lamented that his enemies made so sure of

his death that they divided his garments and cast lots for his vesture.

But he was wiser than he knew,' and, while his words were to his own

apprehension but a vivid metaphor expressing his desperate condition,

the Spirit which was in' him did signify' by them the sufferings of

Christ.' Theories of prophecy or sacrifice which deny the correctness

of John's interpretation have the New Testament against them, and

assume to know more about the workings of inspiration than is either

modest or scientific.

What a contrast the other group presents! John's enumeration of the

women may be read so as to mention four or three, according as His

mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas,' is taken to mean one woman

or two. The latter is the more probable supposition, and it is also

probable that the unnamed sister of our Lord's mother was no other than

Salome, John's own mother. If so, entrusting Mary to John's care would

be the more natural. Tender care, joined with consciousness that

henceforth the relation of son and mother was to be supplanted, not

merely by Death's separating fingers, but by faith's uniting bond,

breathed through the word, so loving yet so removing, Woman, behold thy

son!' Dying trust in the humble friend, which would go far to make the

friend worthy of it, breathed in the charge, to which no form of

address corresponding to Woman' is prefixed. Jesus had nothing else to

give as a parting gift, but He gave these two to each other, and

enriched both. He showed His own loving heart, and implied His faithful

discharge of all filial duties hitherto. And He taught us the lesson,

which many of us have proved to be true, that losses are best made up

when we hear Him pointing us by them to new offices of help to others,

and that, if we will let Him, He will point us too to what will fill

empty places in our hearts and homes.

The second of the words on the Cross which we owe to John is that

pathetic expression, I thirst.' Most significant is the insight into

our Lord's consciousness which John, here as elsewhere, ventures to

give. Not till He knew that all things were accomplished' did He give

heed to the pangs of thirst, which made so terrible a part of the

torture of crucifixion. The strong will kept back the bodily cravings

so long as any unfulfilled duty remained. Now Jesus had nothing to do

but to die, and before He died He let flesh have one little

alleviation. He had refused the stupefying draught which would have

lessened suffering by dulling consciousness, but He asked for the

draught which would momentarily slake the agony of parched lips and

burning throat.

The words of verse 28 are not to be taken as meaning that Jesus said I

thirst' with the mere intention of fulfilling the Scripture. His

utterance was the plaint of a real need, not a performance to fill a

part. But it is John who sees in that wholly natural cry the fulfilment

of the psalm (Ps. lxix. 21). All Christ's bodily sufferings may be said

to be summed up in this one word, the only one in which they found

utterance. The same lips that said, If any man thirst, let him come

unto Me, and drink,' said this. Infinitely pathetic in itself, that cry

becomes almost awful in its appeal to us when we remember who uttered

it, and why He bore these pangs. The very Fountain of living water'

knew the pang of thirst that every one that thirsteth might come to the

waters, and might drink, not water only, but wine and milk, without

money or price.'

John's last contribution to our knowledge of our Lord's words on the

Cross is that triumphant It is finished,' wherein there spoke, not only

the common dying consciousness of life being ended, but the certitude,

which He alone of all who have died, or will die, had the right to feel

and utter, that every task was completed, that all God's will was

accomplished, all Messiah's work done, all prophecy fulfilled,

redemption secured, God and man reconciled. He looked back over all His

life and saw no failure, no falling below the demands of the occasion,

nothing that could have been bettered, nothing that should not have

been there. He looked upwards, and even at that moment He heard in His

soul the voice of the Father saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I

am well pleased!'

Christ's work is finished. It needs no supplement. It can never be

repeated or imitated while the world lasts, and will not lose its power

through the ages. Let us trust to it as complete for all our needs, and

not seek to strengthen the sure foundation' which it has laid by any

shifting, uncertain additions of our own. But we may remember, too,

that while Christ's work is, in one aspect, finished, when He bowed His

head, and by His own will gave up the ghost,' in another aspect His

work is not finished, nor will be, until the whole benefits of His

incarnation and death are diffused through, and appropriated by, the

world. He is working to-day, and long ages have yet to pass, in all

probability, before the voice of Him that sitteth on the throne shall

say It is done!'

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THE TITLE ON THE CROSS

Pilate wrote a title also, and put it on the cross.'--JOHN xix. 19.

This title is recorded by all four Evangelists, in words varying in

form but alike in substance. It strikes them all as significant that,

meaning only to fling a jeer at his unruly subjects, Pilate should have

written it, and proclaimed this Nazarene visionary to be He for whom

Israel had longed through weary ages. John's account is the fullest, as

indeed his narrative of all Pilate's shufflings is the most complete.

He alone records that the title was tri-lingual (for the similar

statement in the Authorised Version of Luke is not part of the original

text). He alone gives the Jews' request for an alteration of the title,

and Pilate's bitter answer. That angry reply betrays his motive in

setting up such words over a crucified prisoner's head. They were meant

as a savage taunt of the Jews, not as an insult to Jesus, which would

have been welcome to them. He seems to have regarded our Lord as a

harmless enthusiast, to have had a certain liking for Him, and a

languid curiosity as to Him, which came by degrees to be just tinged

with awe as he felt that he could not quite make Him out. Throughout,

he was convinced that His claim to be a king contained no menace for

Caesar, and he would have let Jesus go but for fear of being

misrepresented at Rome. He felt that the sacrifice of one more Jew was

a small price to pay to avert his accusation to Caesar; he would have

sacrificed a dozen such to keep his place. But he felt that he was

being coerced to do injustice, and his anger and sense of humiliation

find vent in that written taunt. It was a spurt of bad temper and a

measure of his reluctance.

Besides the interest attaching to it as Pilate's work, it seems to John

significant of much that it should have been fastened on the Cross, and

that it should have been in the three languages, Hebrew (Aramaic),

Greek, and Latin.

Let us deal with three points in succession.

I. The title as throwing light on the actors in the tragedy.

We may consider it, first, in its bearing on Jesus' claims. He was

condemned by the priests on the theocratic charge of blasphemy, because

He made Himself the Son of God. He was sentenced by Pilate on the civil

charge of rebellion, which the priests brought against Him as an

inference necessarily resulting from His claim to be the Son of God.

They drew the same conclusion as Nathanael did long before: Rabbi, Thou

art the Son of God,' and therefore Thou art the King of Israel.' And

they were so far right that if the former designation is correct, the

latter inevitably follows.

Both charges, then, turned on His personal claims. To Pilate He

explained the nature of His kingdom, so as to remove any suspicion that

it would bring Him and His subjects into collision with Rome, but He

asserted His kingship, and it was His own claim that gave Pilate the

material for His gibe. It is worth notice, then, that these two claims

from His own lips, made to the authorities who respectively took

cognisance of the theocratic and of the civic life of the nation, and

at the time when His life hung on the decision of the two, were the

causes of His judicial sentence. The people who allege that Jesus never

made the preposterous claims for Himself which Christians have made for

Him, but was a simple Teacher of morality and lofty religion, have

never fairly faced the simple question: For what, then, was He

crucified?' It is easy for them to dilate on the hatred of the Jewish

officials and the gross earthliness of the masses, as explaining the

attitude of both, but it is not so easy to explain how material was

found for judicial process. One can understand how Jesus was detested

by rulers, and how they succeeded in stirring up popular feeling

against Him, but not how an indictment that would hold water was framed

against Him. Nor would even Pilate's complaisance have gone so far as

to have condemned a prisoner against whom all that could be said was

that he was disliked because he taught wisely and well and was too good

for his critics. The question is, not what made Jesus disliked, but

what set the Law in motion against Him? And no plausible answer has

ever been given except the one that was nailed above His head on the

Cross. It was not His virtues or the sublimity of His teaching, but His

twofold claim to be Son of God and King of Israel that haled Him to His

death.

We may further ask why Jesus did not clear up the mistakes, if they

were mistakes, that led to His condemnation. Surely He owed it to the

two tribunals before which He stood, no less than to Himself and His

followers, to disown the erroneous interpretations on which the charges

against Him were based. Even a Caiaphas was entitled to be told, if it

were so, that He meant no blasphemy and was not claiming anything too

high for a reverent Israelite, when He claimed to be the Son of God. If

Jesus let the Sanhedrim sentence Him under a mistake of what His words

meant, He was guilty of His own death.

We note, further, the light thrown by the Title on Pilate's action. It

shows his sense of the unreality of the charge which he basely allowed

himself to be forced into entertaining as a ground of condemning Jesus.

If this enigmatical prisoner had had a sword, there would have been

some substance in the charge against Him, but He was plainly an

idea-monger, and therefore quite harmless, and His kingship only fit to

be made a jest of and a means of girding at the rulers. Practical men'

always under-estimate the power of ideas. The Title shows the same

contempt for mere theorisers' as animated his question, What is truth?'

How little he knew that this King,' at whom he thought that he could

launch clumsy jests, had lodged in the heart of the Empire a power

which would shatter and remould it!

In his blindness to the radiant truth that stood before him, in the

tragedy of his condemnation of that to which he should have yielded

himself, Pilate stands out as a beacon for all time, warning the world

against looking for the forces that move the world among the powers

that the world recognises and honours. If we would not commit Pilate's

fault over again, we must turn to the base things of this world' and

the things that are not' and find in them the transforming powers

destined to bring to nought things that are.'

Pilate's gibe was an unconscious prophecy. He thought it an exquisite

jest, for it hurt. He was an instance of that strange irony that runs

through history, and makes, at some crisis, men utter fateful words

that seem put into their lips by some higher power. Caiaphas and he,

the Jewish chief of the Sanhedrim and the Roman procurator, were

foremost in Christ's condemnation, and each of them spoke such words,

profoundly true and far beyond the speaker's thoughts. Was the

Evangelist wrong in saying: This spake he not of himself?'

II. The Title on the Cross as unveiling the ground of Christ's

dominion.

It seemed a ludicrous travesty of royalty that a criminal dying there,

with a crowd of his subjects' gloating on his agonies and shooting

arrowy words of scorn at him, should be a King. But His cross is His

throne. It is so because His death is His great work for the world. It

is so because in it we see, with melted hearts, the sublimest

revelation of His love. Absolute authority belongs to utter

self-sacrifice. He, and only He, who gives Himself wholly to and for

me, thereby acquires the right of absolute command over me. He is the

Prince of all the kings of the earth,' because He has died and become

the First-begotten from the dead.' From the hour when He said, I, if I

be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me,' down to the hour when the

seer heard the storm of praise from ten thousand times ten thousand,

and thousands of thousands' breaking round the throne, every New

Testament reference to Christ's dominion is accompanied with a

reference to His cross, and every reference to His cross merges in a

reference to His throne. The crown of thorns was a revelation of the

inmost nature of Christ's rule. The famous Iron Crown of Milan is a

hard, cold circlet within a golden covering blazing with jewels.

Christ's right to sway men, like His power to do so, rests on His

sacrifice for men. A Christianity without a Cross is a Christianity

without authority, as has been seen over and over again in the history

of the Church, and as is being seen again today, if men would only

look. A Christ without a Cross is a Christ without a Kingdom. The

dominion of the world belongs to Him who can sway men's inmost motives.

Hearts are His who has bought them with His own.

III. The Title as prophesying Christ's universal dominion.

The three tongues in which it was written were chosen simply to make it

easy to read by the crowd from every part of the Empire assembled at

the Passover. There were Palestinian Jews there who probably read

Aramaic only, and representatives from the widely diffused Jewish

emigration in Greek-speaking lands, as well as Roman officials and Jews

from Italy who would be most familiar with Latin. Pilate wanted his

shaft to reach them all. It was, in its tri-lingual character, a sign

of Israel's degradation and a flourishing of the whip in their faces,

as a government order in English placarded in a Bengalee village might

be, or a Russian ukase in Warsaw. Its very wording betrayed a foreign

hand, for a Jew would have written King of Israel,' not of the Jews.'

But John divined a deeper meaning in this Title, just as he found a

similar prophecy of the universality of Christ's death in the analogous

word of Caiaphas. As in that saying he heard a faint prediction that

Jesus should die not for that people only, but that He might also

gather into one the scattered children of God,' so he feels that Pilate

was wiser than he knew, and that his written words in their threefold

garb symbolised the relation of Christ and His work to the three great

types of civilisation which it found possessed of the field. It bent

them all to its own purposes, absorbed them into itself, used their

witness and was propagated by means of them, and finally sucked the

life out of them and disintegrated them. The Jew contributed the

morality and monotheism of the Old Testament; the Greek, culture and

the perfected language that should contain the treasure, the fresh

wine-skin for the new wine; the Roman made the diffusion of the kingdom

possible by the pax Romana, and at first sheltered the young plant. All

three, no doubt, marred as well as helped the development of

Christianity, and infused into it deleterious elements, which cling to

it to-day, but the prophecy of the Title was fulfilled and these three

tongues became heralds of the Cross and with loud, uplifted trumpets

blew' glad tidings to the ends of the world.

That Title thus became an unconscious prophecy of Christ's universal

dominion. The Psalmist that sang of Messiah's world-wide rule was sure

that all nations shall serve Him,' and the reason why he was certain of

it was for He shall deliver the needy when he crieth.' We may be

certain of it for the same reason. He who can deal with man's primal

needs, and is ready and able to meet every cry of the heart, will never

want suppliants and subjects. He who can respond to our consciousness

of sin and weakness, and can satisfy hungry hearts, will build His sway

over the hearts whom He satisfies on foundations deep as life itself.

The history of the past becomes a prophecy of the future. Jesus has

drawn men of all sorts, of every stage of culture and layer of

civilisation, and of every type of character to Him, and the power

which has carried a peasant of Nazareth to be the acknowledged King of

the civilised world is not exhausted, and will not be till He is

throned as Saviour and Ruler of the whole earth. There is only one

religion in the world that is obviously growing. The gods of Greece and

Rome are only subjects for studies in Comparative Mythology, the

labyrinthine pantheon of India makes no conquests, Buddhism is

moribund. All other religions than Christianity are shut up within

definite and comparatively narrow geographical and chronological

limits. But in spite of premature jubilations of enemies and much hasty

talk about the need for a re-statement (which generally means a

negation) of Christian truth, we have a clear right to look forward

with quiet confidence. Often in the past has the religion of Jesus

seemed to be wearing or worn out, but it has a strange recuperative

power, and is wont to startle its enemies' paeans over its grave by

rising again and winning renewed victories. The Title on the Cross is

for ever true, and is written again in nobler fashion on the vesture

and on the thigh' of Him who rides forth at last to rule the nations,

KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.'

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THE IRREVOCABLE PAST

What I have written I have written.'--JOHN xix. 22.

This was a mere piece of obstinacy. Pilate knew that he had prostituted

his office in condemning Jesus, and he revenged himself for weak

compliance by ill-timed mulishness. A cool-headed governor would have

humoured his difficult subjects in such a trifle, as a just one would

have been inflexible in a matter of life and death. But this man's

facile yielding and his stiff-necked obstinacy were both misplaced. So

I will, so I command. Let my will suffice for a reason,' was what he

meant. He had written his gibe, and not all the Jews in Jewry should

make him change.

But his petulant answer to the rulers' request for the removal of the

offensive placard carried in it a deeper meaning, as the Title also

did, and as the people's fierce yell, His blood be on us and on our

children,' did. Possibly the Evangelist had some thought of that sort

in recording this saying; but, at all events, I venture to take a

liberty with it which I should not do if it were a word of God's, or if

it were given for our instruction. So I take it now as expressing in a

vivid way, and irrespective of Pilate's intention, the thought of the

irrevocable past.

I. Every man is perpetually writing a permanent record of himself.

It is almost impossible to get the average man to think of his life as

a whole, or to realise that the fleeting present leaves indelible

traces. They seem to fade away wholly. The record appears to be written

in water. It is written in ink which is invisible, but as indelible as

invisible. Grammarians define the perfect tense as that which expresses

an action completed in the past and of which the consequences remain in

the present. That is true of all our actions. Our characters, our

circumstances, our remembrances, are all permanent. Every day we make

entries in our diary.

II. That record, once written, is irrevocable.

We all know what it is to long that some one action should have been

otherwise, to have taken some one step which perhaps has coloured

years, and which we would give the world not to have taken. But it

cannot be. Remorse cannot alter it. Wishes are vain. Repentance is

vain. A new line of conduct is vain.

What an awful contrast in this respect between time future and time

past! Think of the indefinite possibilities in the one, the rigid

fixity of the other. Our present actions are like cements that dry

quickly and set hard on exposure to the air--the dirt of the trowel

abides on the soft brick for ever. Many cuneiform inscriptions were

impressed with a piece of wood on clay, and are legible millenniums

after.

We have to write currente calamo, and as soon as written, the MS. is

printed and stereotyped, and no revising proofs nor erasures are

possible. An action, once done, escapes from us wholly.

How needful, then, to have lofty principles ready at hand! The fresco

painter must have a sure touch, and a quick hand, and a full mind.

What a boundless field the future offers us! How much it may be! How

much, perhaps, we resolve it shall be! What a shrunken heap the harvest

is! Are you satisfied with what you have written?

III. This record, written here, is read yonder.

Our actions carry eternal consequences. These will be read by

ourselves. Character remains. Memory remains.

We shall read with all illusions stripped away.

Others will read--God and a universe.

We shall all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ.'

IV. This record may be blotted out by the blood of Christ.

It cannot be made not to have been, but God's pardon will be given, and

in respect to all personal consequences it is made non-existent.

Circumstances may remain, but their pressure is different. Character

may be renewed and sanctified, and even made loftier by the evil past.

Our dead selves may become stepping-stones to higher things.'

Memory may remain, but its sting is gone, and new hopes, and joys, and

work may fill the pages of our record.

He took away the handwriting that was against us, nailing it to His

Cross.'

Our lives and characters may become a palimpsest. I will write upon him

My new name.' Ye are an epistle of Christ ministered by us.'

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CHRIST'S FINISHED AND UNFINISHED WORK

Jesus . . . said, It is finished.'--JOHN xix. 30.

He said unto me, It is done.'--REV. xxi. 6.

One of these sayings was spoken from the Cross, the other from the

Throne. The Speaker of both is the same. In the one, His voice then

shook the earth,' as the rending rocks testified; in the other, His

voice will shake not the earth only but also heaven'; for new heavens

and a new earth' accompanied the proclamation. In the one, like some

traveller ready to depart, who casts a final glance over his

preparations, and, satisfied that nothing is omitted, gives his

charioteer the signal and rolls away, Jesus Christ looked back over His

life's work, and, knowing that it was accomplished, summoned His

servant Death, and departed. In the other, He sets His seal to the

closed book of the world's history, and ushers in a renovated universe.

The one masks the completion of the work on which the world's

redemption rests, the other marks the completion of the age-long

process by which the world's redemption is actually realised. The one

proclaims that the foundation is laid, the other that the headstone is

set on the finished building. The one bids us trust in a past perfected

work; the other bids us hope in the perfect accomplishment of the

results of that work. Taken singly, these sayings are grand; united,

they suggest thoughts needed always, never more needful than to-day.

I. We see here the work which was finished on the Cross.

The Evangelist gives great significance to the words of my first text,

as is shown by his statement in a previous verse: Jesus, knowing that

all things were now accomplished, said, I thirst,' and then--It is

finished.' That is to say, there is something in that dying voice a

great deal deeper and more wonderful than the ordinary human utterance

with which a dying man might say, It is all over now. I have done,' for

this utterance came from the consciousness that all things had been

accomplished by Him, and that He had done His life's work.

Now, there, taking the words even in their most superficial sense, we

come upon the strange peculiarity which marks off the life of Jesus

Christ from every other life that was ever lived. There are no loose

ends left, no unfinished tasks drop from His nerveless hands, to be

taken up and carried on by others. His life is a rounded whole, with

everything accomplished that had been endeavoured, and everything done

that had been commanded. His hands have laid the foundation; His hands

shall also finish.' He alone of the sons of men, in the deepest sense,

completed His task, and left nothing for successors. The rest of us are

taken away when we have reared a course or two of the structure, the

dream of building which brightened our youth. The pen drops from

paralysed hands in the middle of a sentence, and a fragment of a book

is left. The painter's brush falls with his palette at the foot of his

easel, and but the outline of what he conceived is on the canvas. All

of us leave tasks half done, and have to go away before the work is

completed. The half-polished columns that lie at Baalbec are but a

symbol of the imperfection of every human life. But this Man said, It

is finished,' and gave up the ghost.' Now, if we ponder on what lies in

that consciousness of completion, I think we find, mainly, three

things.

Christ rendered a complete obedience. All through His life we see Him,

hearing with the inward ear the solemn voice of the Father, and

responding to it with that I must' which runs through all His days,

from the earliest dawning of consciousness, when He startled His mother

with I must be about My Father's business,' until the very last

moments. In that obedience to the all-present necessity which He

cheerfully embraced and perfectly discharged, there was no flaw. He

alone of men looks back upon a life in which His clear consciousness

detected neither transgression nor imperfection. In the midst of His

career He could front His enemies with Which of you convinceth Me of

sin?' and no man then, and no man in all the generations that have

elapsed since--though some have been blind enough to try it, and

malicious enough to utter their attempts,--has been able to answer the

challenge. In the midst of His career He said, I do always the things

that please Him'; and nobody then or since has been able to lay his

finger upon an act of His in which, either by excess or defect, or

contrariety, the will of God has not been fully represented. At the

beginning of His career He said, in answer to the Baptist's

remonstrance, It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness,' and at the

end of His career He looked back, and knowing that He had thus done

what became Him--namely, fulfilled it all--He said, It is finished!'

The utterance further expresses Christ's consciousness of having

completed the revelation of God. Jesus Christ has made known the

Father, and the generations since have added nothing to His revelation.

The very people, to-day, that turn away from Christianity, in the name

of higher conceptions of the divine nature, owe their conceptions of it

to the Christ from whom they turn. Not in broken syllables; not at

sundry times and in divers manners,' but with the one perfect,

full-toned name of God on His lips, and vocal in His life, He has

declared the Father unto us. In the course of His career He said, He

that hath seen Me hath seen the Father'; and, looking back on His life

of manifestation of God, He proclaimed, It is finished!' And the world

has since, with all its thinking, added nothing to the name which

Christ has declared.

The utterance farther expresses His consciousness of having made a

completed, atoning Sacrifice. Remember that the words of my first text

followed that awful cry that came from the darkness, and as by one

lightning flash, show us the waves and billows rolling over His head.

My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?' In that infinitely pathetic

and profound utterance, to the interpretation of which our powers go

but a little way, Jesus Christ blends together, in the most marvellous

fashion, desolation and trust, the consciousness that God is His God,

and the consciousness that He is bereft of the light of His presence.

Brethren! I know of no explanation of these words which does justice to

both the elements that are intertwined so intimately in them, except

the old one, which listens to Him as they come from His quivering lip,

and says, The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.'

Ah, brethren! unless there was something a great deal more than the

physical shrinking from physical death in that piteous cry, Jesus

Christ did not die nearly as bravely as many a poor, trembling woman

who, at the stake or the block, has owed her fortitude to Him. Many a

blood-stained criminal has gone out of life with less tremor than that

which, unless you take the explanation that Scripture suggests of the

cry, marred the last hours of Jesus Christ. Having drained the cup, He

held it up inverted when He said It is finished!' and not a drop

trickled down the edge. He drank it that we might never need to drink

it; and so His dying voice proclaimed that by one offering for sin for

ever,' He obtained eternal redemption' for us.

II. Now, secondly, note the work which began from the Cross. Between my

two texts lie untold centuries, and the whole development of the

consequences of Christ's death, like some great valley stretching

between twin mountain-peaks on either side, which from some points of

view will be foreshortened and invisible, but when gazed down upon, is

seen to stretch widely leagues broad, from mountain ridge to mountain

ridge. So my two texts, by the fact that millenniums have to interpose

between the time when It is finished!' is spoken, and the time when It

is done!' can be proclaimed from the Throne, imply that the interval is

filled by a continuous work of our Lord's, which began at the moment

when the work on the Cross ended.

Now it has very often been the case, as I take leave to think, that the

interpretation of the former of these two texts has been of such a kind

as to distort the perspective of Christian truth, and to obscure the

fact of that continuous work of our Lord's. Therefore it may not be out

of place if, in a sentence or two, I recall to you the plain teaching

of the New Testament upon this matter. It is finished!' Yes; and as the

lower course of some great building is but the foundation for the

higher, when finished' it is but begun. The work which, in one aspect,

is the close, in another aspect is the commencement of Christ's further

activity. What did He say Himself, when He was here with His disciples?

I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you.' What was the

last word that came fluttering down, like an olive leaf, into the

bosoms of the men as they stood with uplifted faces gazing upon Him as

He disappeared? Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the ages.'

What is the keynote of the book which carries on the story of the

Gospels in the history of the militant Church? The former treatise have

I made. . . of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the

day in which He was taken up'--and, being taken up, continued, in a new

form, both the doing and the teaching. Thus that book, misnamed the

Acts of the Apostles, sets Him forth as the Worker of all the progress

of the Church. Who is it that adds to the Church daily such as were

being saved?' The Lord. Who is it that opened the hearts of the hearers

to the message? The Lord. Who is it that flings wide the prison-gates

when His persecuted servants are in chains? The Lord. Who is it that

bids one man attach himself to the chariot of the eunuch of Ethiopia,

and another man go and bear witness in Rome? The Lord. Through the

whole of that book there runs the keynote, as its dominant thought,

that men are but the instruments, and the hand that wields them is

Christ's, and that He who wrought the finished work that culminated on

Calvary is operating a continuous work through the ages from His

Throne.

Take that last book of Scripture, which opens with a view of the

ascended Christ walking in the midst of the seven candlesticks, and

holding the stars in His right hand;' which further draws aside the

curtains of the heavenly sanctuary, and lets us see the Lamb in the

midst of the Throne,' opening the seven seals--that is to say, setting

loose for their progress through the world the forces that make the

history of humanity, and which culminates in the vision of the final

battle in which the Incarnate Word of God goes forth to victory, with

all the armies of heaven following Him. Are not its whole spirit and

message that Jesus Christ, the Lamb who is the Antagonist of the Beast,

is working through all the history of the world, and will work till its

kingdoms are become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ?'

Now, that continuous operation of Jesus Christ in the midst of men is

not to be weakened down to the mere continued influence of the truths

which He proclaimed, or the Gospel which He brought. There is something

a great deal more than the diminishing vibrations of a force long since

set in operation, and slowly ceasing to act. Dead teachers do still

rule our spirits from their urns'; but it is no dead Christ who, by the

influence of what He did when He was living, sways the world and

comforts His Church; it is a living Christ who to-day is working in His

people, by His Spirit. Further, He works on the world through His

people by the Word; they plant and water, He gives the increase.' And

He is working in the world, for His Church and for the world, by His

wielding of all power that is given to Him, in heaven and on earth. So

that the work that is done upon earth He doeth it all Himself; and

Christian people unduly limit the sphere of Christ's operations when

they look back only to the Cross, and talk about a finished work'

there, and forget that that finished work there is but the vestibule of

the continuous work that is being done to-day.

Christian people! The present work of Christ needs working servants. We

are here in order to carry on His work. The Apostle ventured to say

that he was appointed to fill up that which is behind of the sufferings

of Christ'; we may well venture to say that we are here mainly to apply

to the world the benefits resulting from the finished work upon the

Cross. The accomplishment of redemption, and the realisation of the

accomplished redemption, are two wholly different things. Christ has

done the one. He says to us, You are honoured to help Me to do the

other.' According to the accurate rendering of a great saying of the

Old Testament, Take no rest, and give Him no rest, till He establish

and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth, Christ's work is finished;

there is nothing for us to do with it but trust it. Christ's work is

going on; come to His help. Ye are fellow-labourers with and to the

Incarnate Truth.

III. I need not say more than a word about the third thought, suggested

by these texts--viz., the completion of the work which began on the

Cross.

It is done!' That lies, no man knows how far, ahead of us. As surely as

astronomers tell us that all this universe is hastening towards a

central point, so surely that far-off divine event' is that to which

the whole creation moves.' It is the blaze of light which fills the

distant end of the dim vista of human history. Its elements are in part

summed up in the context--the tabernacle of God with men, the perfected

fellowship of the human with the divine, the housing of men in the very

home and heart of God; a new heaven and a new earth,' a renovated

universe; the removal of all evil, suffering, sorrow, sin, and tears.

These things are to be, and shall be, when He says It is done!'

Brethren! nothing else than such an issue can be the end of Creation,

for nothing else than such is the purpose of God for man, and God is

not going to be beaten by the world and the devil. Nothing else than

such can be the issue of the Cross; for He shall see of the travail of

His soul, and shall be satisfied,' and Christ is not going to labour in

vain, and spend His life, and give His breath and His blood for nought.

Nothing but the work finished on the Cross guarantees the coming of

that perfected issue. I know not where else there is hope for mankind,

looking on the history of humanity, except in that great message, that

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come, has died, lives for ever, and

is the world's King and Lord.

So for ourselves, in regard to the one part of the work, let us listen

to Him saying It is finished!' abandon all attempts to eke it out by

additions of our own, and cast ourselves on the finished Revelation,

the finished Obedience, the finished Atonement, made once for all on

the Cross. But as for the continuous work going on through the ages,

let us cast ourselves into it with earnestness, self-sacrifice,

consecration, and continuity, for we are fellow-workers with Christ,

and Christ will work in, with, and for us if we will work for Him.

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CHRIST OUR PASSOVER

These things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone

of Him shall not be broken.'--JOHN xix. 36.

The Evangelist, in the words of this text, points to the great Feast of

the Passover and to the Paschal Lamb, as finding their highest

fulfilment, as he calls it, in Jesus Christ. For this purpose of

bringing out the correspondence between the shadow and the substance he

avails himself of a singular coincidence concerning a perfectly

unimportant matter--viz., the abnormally rapid sinking of Christ's

physical strength in the crucifixion, by which the final indignity of

breaking the bones of the sufferers was avoided in His case. John sees,

in that entirely insignificant thing, a kind of fingerpost pointing to

far more important, deeper, and real correspondences. We are not to

suppose that he was so purblind, and attached so much importance to

externals, as that this outward coincidence exhausted in his conception

the correspondence between the two. But It was a trifle that suggested

a greater matter. It was a help aiding gross conceptions and common

minds to grasp the inward relation between Jesus and that Passover

rite. But just as our Lord would have fulfilled the prophecy about the

King coming meek, and having salvation,' though He had never ridden on

a literal ass into the literal Jerusalem, so our Lord would have

fulfilled' the shadow of the Passover with the substance of His own

sacrifice if there had never been this insignificant correspondence, in

outward things, between the two.

But whilst my text is the Evangelist's commentary, the question arises,

How did he come to recognise that our Lord was all which that Passover

signified? And the answer is, he recognised it through Christ's own

teaching. He does not record the institution of the Lord's Supper. It

did not fall into his scheme to deal with external events of that sort,

and he knew that it had been sufficiently taught by the three earlier

Gospels, to which his is a supplement. But though he did not narrate

the institution, he takes it for granted in the words of my text, and

his vindication of his seeing the fulfilment of A bone of Him shall not

be broken' in the incident to which I have referred, lies in this, that

Jesus Christ Himself swept away the Passover and substituted the

memorial feast of the Lord's Supper. This do in remembrance of Me,'

said at the table where the Paschal lamb had been eaten, sufficiently

warrants John's allusion here.

So then, marking the fact that our Evangelist is but carrying out the

lesson that he had learned in the upper room, we may fairly take the

identification of the Paschal lamb with the crucified Christ as being

the last instance in which our Lord Himself laid His hand upon Old

Testament incidents and said, They all mean Me.' And it is from that

point of view, and not merely for the purpose of dealing with the words

that I have read as our starting-point, that I wish to speak now.

I. Now then, the first thing that strikes me is that in this

substitution of Himself for the Passover we have a strange instance of

Christ's supreme authority.

Try to fling yourself back in imagination to that upper room, where

Jesus and a handful of Galileans were sitting, and remember the

sanctity which immemorial usage had cast round that centre and apex of

the Jewish ritual, established at the Exodus by a solemn divine

appointment, intended to commemorate the birth of the nation, venerable

by antiquity and association with the most vehement pulsations of

national feeling, the centre point of Jewish religion. Christ said: Put

it all away; do not think about the Exodus; do not think about the

destroying Angel; do not think about the deliverance. Forget all the

past; do this in remembrance of Me.' Take into account that the

Passover had a double sacredness, as a religious festival, and also as

commemorating the birthday of the nation, and then estimate what a

strange sense of His own importance the Man must have had who said:

That past is done with, and it is Me that you have to think of now.' If

I might venture to take a very modern illustration without vulgarising

a great thing, suppose that on the other side of the Atlantic somebody

were to stand up and say, I abrogate the Fourth of July and

Independence Day. Do not think about Washington and the establishment

of the United States any more. Think about me!' That is exactly what

Jesus Christ did. Only instead of a century there were millenniums of

observance which He thus laid aside. So I say that is a strange

exercise of authority.

What does it imply? It implies two things, and I must say a word about

each of them. It implies that Christ regarded the whole of the ancient

system of Judaism, its history, its law, its rites of worship, as

pointing onwards to Himself, that He recognised in it a system the

whole raison d'etre of which was anticipatory and preparatory of

Himself. For Him the Decalogue was given, for Him priests were

consecrated, for Him kings were anointed, for Him prophets spake, for

Him sacrifices smoked, for Him festivals were appointed, and the nation

and its history were all one long proclamation: The King cometh! go ye

forth to meet Him.' You cannot get less than that out of the way in

which He handled, as is told in this Gospel, Jacob's ladder, the

Serpent in the wilderness, the Manna that fell from Heaven, the Pillar

of Cloud that led the people, the Rock that gushed forth water, and

now, last of all, the Passover, which was the very shining apex of the

whole sacrificial and ritual system.

And remember, too, that this way of dealing with all the institutions

of the nation as meaning, in their inmost purpose, Himself, is exactly

parallel to His way of dealing with the sacred words of Mosaic

commandment and prohibition in the Sermon on the Mount, where He set

side by side as of equal--I was going to say, and I should have been

right in saying, identical--authority what was said to them of old

time' and what I say unto you.' Amidst the dust of our present

controversies as to the processes by which, and the times at which, the

Old Testament books assumed their present form, there is grave danger

that the essential thing about the whole matter should be obscured. The

way in which what is called Higher Criticism may finally locate the

origins and dates of the various parts of that ancient record and that

ancient system does not in the slightest degree affect the outstanding

characteristic of the whole, that it is the product of the divine hand,

working (if you will) through men who had more freedom of action whilst

they were its organs than our grandfathers thought. Be it so; but still

that divine Hand shaped the whole in order that, besides its

educational effects upon the generations that received it, there should

shine through it all the expectation of the coming King. And I venture

to say that, however grateful we may be to modern investigation for

light upon these other points to which I have referred, the ignorant

reader that reads Jesus Christ into all the Old Testament may be very

uncritical and mistaken in regard to details, but he has got hold of

the root of the matter, and is nearer to the apprehension of the

essence and spirit and purpose of the ancient Revelation than the most

learned critic who does not see that it is the preparation for, and the

prophecy of, Jesus Christ Himself. And the vindication of such a

position lies in this, among other facts, that He in the upper room, in

harmony with, and in completion of, all that He had previously spoken

about His relation to the Old Testament, claimed the Passover as the

prophecy of Himself, and said, I am the Lamb of God.'

I need not dwell, I suppose, on the other consideration that is

involved in this strange exercise of authority--viz., the naturalness,

as without any sense of doing anything presumptuous or extraordinary,

with which Christ assumes His right to handle divine appointments with

the most perfect freedom, to modify them, to reshape them, to divert

them from their first purpose, and to enjoin them with an authority

equal to that with which the Lord said unto Moses, Keep ye this day

through your generations.' There is only one supposition on which I,

for my part, can understand that conduct--that He was the possessor of

authority the same as the Authority that had originally instituted the

rite.

And so, dear brethren! when our Lord said, Do this in remembrance of

Me,' I pray you to ask yourselves, What did that involve in regard to

His nature and the source of His authority over us? And what did it

involve in regard to His relation to that ancient Revelation?

II. And now another point that I would suggest is--we have, in this

substitution of the new rite for the old, our Lord's clear declaration

of what was the very heart of His work in the world.

This do in remembrance of Me.' What is it, then, to which He points? Is

it to the wisdom, the tenderness, the deep beauty, the flashing moral

purity that gleamed and shone lambent in His words? No! Is it to the

gracious self--oblivion, the gentle accessibility, the loving pity, the

leisurely heart always ready to help, the eye ready to fill with tears,

the hand ever outstretched and ever laden with blessings? No! It is the

death on the Cross which He, if I might so say, isolates, at least

which He underscores with red lines, and which He would have us

remember, as we remember nothing else. Brethren, rites are

insignificant in many aspects, but are often of enormous importance as

witnesses to truths. And I point to the Lord's Supper, the one rite of

the Christian Church, which is to be repeated over and over and over

again, and see in it the great barrier which has rendered it

impossible, and will render it impossible, as I believe, for evermore,

that a Christianity, which obscures the atoning sacrifice of Christ on

the Cross, should ever pose as the full representation of the Master's

mind, or as the full expression of the Saviour's word.

What do men and churches that falter in their allegiance to the truth

of Christ's redemptive death do with the Lord's Supper? Nothing! For

the most part they ignore it, or if they retain it, do not, for the

life of them, know how to explain it, or why it should be there. The

explanation of why it is there is the great truth, of which it is the

clear utterance and the strong defence, the truth that Jesus Christ

died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' and that the Son of Man

came. . . to give His life a ransom for the many.'

What did that Passover say? Two things it said, the blood that was

sprinkled on the lintels and on the door-posts was the token to the

destroying Angel, as with his broad, silent pinions he swept through

the land, bringing a blacker night into Egyptian darkness, and leaving

behind him no house in which there was not one dead.' All the houses of

which the occupants had put the ruddy mark on the lintels and on the

doorposts, and were wise enough not to go forth from behind the shelter

of that mark on the door, were safe when the morning dawned. And so to

us all who, by our sinfulness, have brought down upon our heads

exposedness to that retribution, which, in a righteously governed

universe, must needs follow sin, and to that death which the separation

from God--the necessary result of sin--most surely is, there is

proffered in that great Sacrifice shelter from the destroying sword.

But that is not all. Whilst the blood on the posts meant security, the

Lamb on the table meant emancipation. So they who find in the dying

Christ their exemption from the last consequences of transgression,

find, in partaking of the Christ whose sacrifice is their pardon, the

communication of a new power, which sets them free from a worse than

Egyptian bondage, and enables them to shake from their emancipated

limbs the fetters of the grimmest of the Pharaohs that have wielded a

tyrannous dominion over them. Pardon and freedom, the creation of a

nation subject only to the law of Jehovah Himself--these were the facts

that the Passover festival and the Passover lamb signified, and these

are the facts which, in nobler fashion, are brought to us by Jesus

Christ. So, I beseech you, let Him teach you what His work in the world

is, as He lays His own hand on that highest of the ancient festivals,

and endorses the Baptist's declaration, Behold the Lamb of God, which

taketh away the sin of the world!'

III. Now, lastly, let me ask you to notice how, in this regal and

authoritative dealing by our Lord with that ancient festival, there

lies a loving provision for our weakness.

Surely we may venture to say that Jesus Christ desired to be

remembered, even by that handful of poor people, and by us, not only

for our sakes, but because His heart, too, craved that He should not be

forgotten by those whom He was leaving. As you may remember, the dying

king turned to the bishop standing by him, with the enigmatical word

which no one understood but the receiver of it--Remember!' so did Jesus

Christ. He appeals to our thankfulness, He appeals to our affections,

He lets us see that He wishes to live in our memories, because He

delights in it, as well as because it is for our profit.

The Passover was purely and simply a rite of remembrance. I venture to

believe that the Lord's Supper is nothing more. I know how people talk

about the bare, bald, Zwinglian ideas of the Communion. They do look

very bald and bare by the side of modern notions and mediaeval notions

resuscitated. Well, I had rather have the bareness than I would have it

overlaid by coverings under which there is room for abundance of vermin

to lurk. Christ puts the Lord's Supper in the place of the Passover.

The Passover was a purely memorial rite. You Christian people will

understand the spirituality of the whole Gospel system, and the nature

of the only bond which unites men to Jesus and brings spiritual

blessings to them--viz. faith--all the better, the more you cling, in

spite of all that is going on round us to-day, to that simple,

intelligible, Scriptural notion that we commemorate the Sacrifice, not

offer the Sacrifice. Jesus Christ said that the Lord's Supper was to be

observed in remembrance of Me.' That was His explanation of its

purpose, and I for one am content to take as the expounder of the laws

of the feast, the feast's own Founder.

Now one more word. In the Passover men fed on the Sacrifice. Jesus

Christ presents Himself to each of us as at once the Sacrifice for our

sins and the Food of our souls. If you will keep your minds in touch

with the truth about Him, and with Him whom the truth about Him reveals

to you, if you will keep your hearts in touch with that great and

unspeakable sign of God's love, if you will keep your wills in

submission to His authority, if you will let His blood, which is the

life,' or as you may otherwise word it, His Spirit, come into your

lives, and be your spirit, your motive, then you will go out from the

table, not like the disciples to flee, and deny, and forget, nor like

the Israelites to wander in a wilderness, but strengthened for many a

day of joyous service and true communion, and will come at last to what

He has promised us: Ye shall sit with Me at My table in My Kingdom,'

whence we shall go no more out.'

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JOSEPH AND NICODEMUS

And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but

secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away

the body of Jesus; . . . And there came also Nicodemus which at the

first came to Jesus by night.'--JOHN xix. 38, 39.

While Christ lived, these two men had been unfaithful to their

convictions; but His death, which terrified and paralysed and scattered

His avowed disciples, seems to have shamed and stung them into courage.

They came now, when they must have known that it was too late, to

lavish honour and tears on the corpse of the Master whom they had been

too cowardly to acknowledge, whilst acknowledgment might yet have

availed. How keen an arrow of self-condemnation must have pierced their

hearts as they moved in their offices of love, which they thought that

He could never know, round His dead corpse!

They were both members of the Sanhedrim; the same motives, no doubt,

had withheld each of them from confessing Christ; the same impulses

united them in this too late confession of discipleship. Nicodemus had

had the conviction, at the beginning of Christ's ministry, that He was

at least a miraculously attested and God-sent Teacher. But the fear

which made him steal to Jesus by night--the unenviable distinction

which the Evangelist pitilessly reiterates at each mention of

him--arrested his growth and kept him dumb when silence was treason.

Joseph of Arimathea is described by two of the Evangelists as a

disciple'; by the other two as a devout Israelite, like Simeon and

Anna, waiting for the Kingdom of God.' Luke informs us that he had not

concurred in the condemnation of Jesus, but leads us to believe that

his dissent had been merely silent. Perhaps he was more fully convinced

than Nicodemus, and at the same time even more timid in avowing his

convictions.

We may take these two contrite cowards as they try to atone for their

unfaithfulness to their living Master by their ministrations to Him

dead, as examples of secret disciples, and see here the causes, the

misery, and the cure of such.

I. Let us look at them as illustrations of secret discipleship and its

causes.

They were restrained from the avowal of the Messiahship of Jesus by

fear. There is nothing in the organisation of society at this day to

make any man afraid of avowing the ordinary kind of Christianity which

satisfies the most of us; rather it is the proper thing with the bulk

of us middle-class people, to say that in some sense or other we are

Christians. But when it comes to a real avowal, a real carrying out of

a true discipleship, there are as many and as formidable, though very

different, impediments in the way to-day, from those which blocked the

path of these two cowards in our text. In all regions of life it is

hard to work out into practice any moral conviction whatever. How many

of us are there who have beliefs about social and moral questions which

we are ashamed to avow in certain companies for fear of the finger of

ridicule being pointed at us? It is not only in the Church, and in

reference to purely religious belief, that we find the curse of secret

discipleship, but it is everywhere. Wherever there are moral questions

which are yet the subject of controversy, and have not been enthroned

with the hallelujahs of all men, you get people that carry their

convictions shut up in their own breasts, and lock their lips in

silence, when there is most need of frank avowal. The political,

social, and moral conflicts of this day have their secret disciples,'

who will only come out of their holes when the battle is over, and will

then shout with the loudest.

But to turn to the more immediate subject before us, how many men and

women, I wonder, are there who ought to be and are not, distinctly and

openly united with the Christian community?

I do not mean to say--God forbid that I should--that connection with

any existing church is the same as a connection with Jesus Christ, or

that the neglect to be so associated is tantamount to secret

discipleship; I know there are plenty of other ways of acknowledging

Him than that, but I am quite sure that this is one department in which

a large number of men, in all our congregations--and there are not a

few in this congregation--need a very plain word of earnest

remonstrance. It is one way of manifesting whose you are, that you

should unite yourselves openly with those who belong to Him, and who

try to serve Him. I do not dwell upon this matter, because I do not

wish to be misunderstood, as if I supposed that union to a church is

equivalent to union with Him; or that a connection with a church is the

only, or even the principal way of making an open avowal of Christian

principle; but I am certain that amongst us in this day there is a

laxity in this matter which is doing harm both to the Church and to

some of you. Therefore I say to you, dear friends, suffer the word of

exhortation as to the duty of openly uniting yourselves with the

Christian community.

But far higher and more important than that--do you ever say anyhow

that you belong to Jesus Christ? In a society like ours, in which the

influence of Christian morality affects a great many people who have no

personal connection with Him, it is not always enough that the life

should preach, because over a very large field of ordinary daily life

the underground influence, so to speak, of Christian ethics has

infiltrated and penetrated, so that many a tree bears a greener leaf

because of the water that has found its way to it from the river,

though it be planted far from its banks. Even those who are not

Christians live outward lives largely regulated by Christian principle.

The whole level of morality has been heaved up, as the coastline has

sometimes been by hidden fires slowly working, by the imperceptible,

gradual influence of the gospel.

So it needs sometimes that you should say I am a Christian,' as well as

that you should live like one. Ask yourselves, dear friends! whether

you have buttoned your greatcoat over your uniform that nobody may know

whose soldier you are. Ask yourselves whether you have sometimes held

your tongues because you knew that if you spoke people would find out

where you came from and what country you belonged to. Ask yourselves,

Have you ever accompanied the witness of your lives with the commentary

of your confession? Did you ever, anywhere but in a church, stand up

and say, I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, my Lord'?

And then ask yourselves another question: Have you ever dared to be

singular? We are all of us in this world often thrust into

circumstances in which it is needful that we should say, So do not I

because of the fear of the Lord.' Boys go to school; they used always

to kneel down at their bedsides and say their prayers when they were at

home. They do not like to do it with all those critical and cruel

eyes--and there are no eyes more critical and more cruel than young

eyes--fixed upon them, and so they give up prayer. A young man comes to

Manchester, goes into a warehouse, pure of life, and with a tongue that

has not blossomed into rank fruit of obscenity and blasphemy. And he

hears, at the next desk there, words that first of all bring a blush to

his cheek, and he is tempted into conduct that he knows to be a denial

of his Master. And he covers up his principles, and goes with the

tempters into the evil. I might sketch a dozen other cases, but I need

not. In one form or other, we have all to go through the same ordeal.

We have sometimes to dare to be in a minority of one, if we will not be

untrue to our Master and to ourselves.

Now the reasons for this unfaithfulness to conviction and to Christ,

are put by the Apostle here in a very blunt fashion--For fear of the

Jews.' That is not what we say to ourselves; some of us say, Oh! I have

got beyond outward organisations. I find it enough to be united to

Christ. The Christian communities are very imperfect. There is not any

of them that I quite see eye to eye with. So I stand apart,

contemplating all, and happy in my unsectarianism.' Yes, I quite admit

the faults, and suppose that as long as men think at all they will not

find any Church which is entirely to their mind; and I rejoice to think

that some day we shall all outgrow visible organisations--when we get

there where the seer saw no temple therein.' Admitting all that, I also

know that isolation is always weakness, and that if a man stand apart

from the wholesome friction of his brethren, he will get to be a great

diseased mass of oddities, of very little use either to himself, or to

men, or to God. It is not a good thing, on the whole, that people

should fight for their own hands, and the wisest thing any of us can do

is, preserving our freedom of opinion, to link ourselves with some body

of Christian people, and to find in them our shelter and our home.

But these two in our text were moved by fear.' They dreaded ridicule,

the loss of position, the expulsion from Sanhedrim and synagogue,

social ostracism, and all the armoury of offensive weapons which would

have been used against them by their colleagues. So, ignobly they kept

their thumb on their convictions, and the two of them sat dumb in the

council when the scornful question was asked, Have any of the rulers or

of the Pharisees believed on Him?' when they ought to have started to

their feet and said Yes, we have!' And when Nicodemus ventured a feeble

remonstrance, which he carefully divested of all appearance of personal

sympathy, and put upon the mere abstract ground of fair play--Doth our

law judge any man before it hear him?'--one contemptuous question was

enough to reduce him to silence. Art thou also of Galilee?' was enough

to cow him into dropping his timid plea for Him whom in his heart he

believed to be the Messiah.

So with us, the fear of loss of position comes into play. I have heard

of people who settled the congregation which they should honour by

their presence from the consideration of the social advantages which it

offered. I have heard of their saying, Oh! we cannot attach ourselves

to such and such a community; there is no society for the children.'

Then many of us are very much afraid of being laughed at. Ridicule, I

think, to sensitive people in a generation like ours, is pretty nearly

as bad as the old rack and the physical torments of martyrdom. We have

all got so nervous and high-strung nowadays, and depend so much upon

other people's good opinion, that it is a dreadful thing to be

ridiculed. Timid people do not come to the front and say what they

believe, and take up unpopular causes, because they cannot bear to be

pointed at and pelted with the abundant epithets of disparagement,

which are always flung at earnest people who will not worship at the

appointed shrines, and have sturdy convictions of their own.

Ridicule breaks no bones. It has no power if you make up your mind that

it shall not have. Face it, and it will only be unpleasant for a moment

at first. When a child goes into the sea to bathe, he is uncomfortable

till his head has been fairly under water, and then after that he is

all right. So it is with the ridicule which out-and-out Christian

faithfulness may bring on us. It only hurts at the beginning, and

people very soon get tired. Face your fears and they will pass away. It

is not perhaps a good advice to give unconditionally, but it is a very

good one in regard of all moral questions--always do what you are

afraid to do. In nine cases out of ten it will be the right thing to

do. If people would only discount the fear of men which bringeth a

snare' by making up their minds to neglect it, there would be fewer

dumb dogs' and secret disciples' haunting and weakening the Church of

Christ.

II. I have spent too much time upon this part of my subject, and I must

deal briefly with the following. Let me say a word about the

illustrations that we have in this text of the miseries of this secret

discipleship.

How much these two men lost--all those three years of communion with

the Master; all His teaching, all the stimulus of His example, all the

joy of fellowship with Him! They might have had a treasure in their

memories that would have enriched them for all their days, and they had

flung it all away because they were afraid of the curled lip of a

long-bearded Pharisee or two.

And so it always is; the secret disciple diminishes his communion with

his Master. It is the valleys which lay their bosoms open to the sun

that rejoice in the light and warmth; the narrow clefts in the rocks

that shut themselves grudgingly up against the light, are all dank and

dark and dismal. And it is the men that come and avow their

discipleship that will have the truest communion with their Lord. Any

neglected duty puts a film between a man and his Saviour; any conscious

neglect of duty piles up a wall between you and Christ. Be sure of

this, that if from cowardly or from selfish regard to position and

advantages, or any other motive, we stand apart from Him, and have our

lips locked when we ought to speak, there will steal over our hearts a

coldness, His face will be averted from us, and our eyes will not dare

to seek, with the same confidence and joy, the light of His

countenance.

What you lose by unfaithful wrapping of your convictions in a napkin

and burying them in the ground is the joyful use of the convictions,

the deeper hold of the truth by which you live, and before which you

bow, and the true fellowship with the Master whom you acknowledge and

confess. And when these men came for Christ's corpse and bore it away,

what a sharp pang went through their hearts! They woke at last to know

what cowardly traitors they had been. If you are a disciple at all, and

a secret one, you will awake to know what you have been doing, and the

pang will be a sharp one. If you do not awake in this life, then the

distance between you and your Lord will become greater and greater; if

you do, then it will be a sad reflection that there are years of

treason lying behind you. Nicodemus and Joseph had the veil torn away

by the contemplation of their dead Master. You may have the veil torn

away from your eyes by the sight of the throned Lord; and when you pass

into the heavens may even there have some sharp pang of condemnation

when you reflect how unfaithful you have been.

Blessed be His name! The assurance is firm that if a man be a disciple

he shall be saved; but the warning is sure that if he be an unfaithful

and a secret disciple there will be a life-long unfaithfulness to a

beloved Master to be purged away so as by fire.'

III. And so, lastly, let me point you to the cure.

These men learned to be ashamed of their cowardice, and their dumb lips

learned to speak, and their shy, hidden love forced for itself a

channel by which it could flow out into the light; because of Christ's

death. And in another fashion that same death and Cross are for us,

too, the cure of all cowardice and selfish silence. The sight of

Christ's Cross makes the coward brave. It was no small piece of courage

for Joseph to go to Pilate and avow his sympathy with a condemned

criminal. The love must have been very true which was forced to speak

by disaster and death. And to us the strongest motive for stiffening

our vacillating timidity into an iron fortitude, and fortifying us

strongly against the fear of what man can do to us, is to be found in

gazing upon His dying love who met and conquered all evils and terrors

for our sakes.

That Cross will kindle a love which will not rest concealed, but will

be like the ointment of the right hand which bewrayeth itself.' I can

fancy men to whom Christ is only what He was to Nicodemus at first, a

Teacher sent from God,' occupying Nicodemus' position of hidden belief

in His teaching without feeling any need to avow themselves His

followers; but if once into our souls there has come the constraining

and the melting influence of that great and wondrous love which died

for us, then, dear brethren, it is unnatural that we should be silent.

If those for whom Christ has died' should hold their peace, the stones

would immediately cry out.' That death, wondrous, mysterious, terrible,

but radiant, and glorious with hope, with pardon, with holiness for us

and for all the world--that death smites on the chords of our hearts,

if I may so speak, and brings out music from them all. The love that

died for me will force me to express my love, Then shall the tongue of

the dumb sing,' and silence will be impossible.

The sight of the Cross not only leads to courage, and kindles a love

which demands expression, but it impels to joyful surrender. Joseph

gave a place in his own new tomb, where he hoped that one day his bones

should be laid by the side of the Master against whom he had

sinned--for he had no thought of a resurrection. Nicodemus brought a

lavish, almost an extravagant, amount of costly spices, as if by honour

to the dead he could atone for treason to the living. And both the one

and the other teach us that if once we gain the true vision of that

great and wondrous love that died on the Cross for us, then the natural

language of the loving heart is--

Here, Lord! I give myself away; Tis all that I can do.'

If following Him openly involves sacrifices, the sacrifices will be

sweet, so long as our hearts look to His dying love. All love delights

in expression, and most of all in expression by surrender of precious

things, which are most precious because they give love materials which

it may lay at the beloved's feet. What are position, possessions,

reputation, capacities, perils, losses, self, but the sweet spices'

which we are blessed enough to be able to lay upon the altar which

glorifies the Giver and the gift? The contemplation of Christ's

sacrifice--and that alone--will so overcome our natural selfishness as

to make sacrifice for His dear sake most blessed.

I beseech you, then, look ever to Him dying on the Cross for each of

us. It will kindle our courage, it will make our hearts glow with love,

it will turn our silence into melody and music of praise; it will lead

us to heights of consecration and joys of confession; and so it will

bring us at last into the possession of that wondrous honour which He

promised when He said, He that confesseth Me before men, him will I

also confess; and he that denieth Me before men, him will I also deny.'

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THE GRAVE IN A GARDEN

In the garden a new tomb.'--JOHN xix. 41 (R.V.).

This is possibly no more than a topographical note introduced merely

for the sake of accuracy. But it is quite in John's manner to attach

importance to these apparent trifles and to give no express statement

that he is doing so. There are several other instances in the Gospel

where similar details are given which appear to have had in his eyes a

symbolical meaning--e.g. And it was night.' There may have been such a

thought in his mind, for all men in high excitement love and seize

symbols, and I can scarcely doubt that the reason which induced Joseph

to make his grave in a garden was the reason which induced John to

mention so particularly its situation, and that they both discerned in

that garden round the sepulchre, the expression of what was to the one

a dim desire, to the other a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus

Christ from the dead'--that they who are laid to rest in the grave

shall come forth again in new and fairer life, as the garden causeth

the things that are sown in it to bud.'

To us at all events on Easter morning, with nature rising on every hand

from her winter death, and life re-orient out of dust,' that new

sepulchre in the garden may well serve for the starting-point of the

familiar but ever-precious lessons of the day.

I. A symbol of death and decay as interwoven with all nature and every

joy.

We think of Eden and the first coming of death.

The grave was fittingly in the garden, because nature too is subject to

the law of decay and death. The flowers fade and men die. Meditative

souls have ever gathered lessons of mortality there, and invested death

with an alien softness by likening it to falling leaves and withered

blooms. But the contrast is greater than the resemblance, and painless

dropping of petals is not a parallel to the rending of soul and body.

The garden's careless wealth of beauty and joy continues unconcerned

whatever befalls us. One generation cometh and another goeth, but the

earth abideth for ever.'

The grave is in the garden because all our joys and works have sooner

or later death associated with them.

Every relationship.

Every occupation.

Every joy.

The grave in the garden bids us bring the wholesome contemplation of

death into all life.

It may be a harm and weakening to think of it, but should be a

strength.

II. The dim hopes with which men have fought against death.

To lay the dead amid blooming nature and fair flowers has been and is

natural to men. The symbolism is most natural, deep, and beautiful,

expressing the possibility of life and even of advance in the life

after apparent decay. There is something very pathetic in so eager a

grasping after some stay for hope.

All these natural symbols are insufficient. They are not proofs, they

are only pretty analogies. But they are all that men have on which to

build their hopes as to a future life apart from Christ. That future

was vague, a region for hopes and wishes or fears, not for certainty, a

region for poetic fancies. The thoughts of it were very faintly

operative. Men asked, Shall we live again? Conscience seemed to answer,

Yes! The instinct of immortality in men's souls grasped at these things

as proofs of what it believed without them, but there was no clear

light.

III. The clear light of certain hope which Christ's resurrection

brings.

The grave in the garden reversed Adam's bringing of death into Eden.

Christ's resurrection as a fact bears on the belief in a future state

as nothing else can.

It changes hope into certainty. It shows by actual example that death

has nothing to do with the soul; that life is independent of the body;

that a man after death is the same as before it. The risen Lord was the

same in His relations to His disciples, the same in His love, in His

memory, and in all else.

It changes shadowy hopes of continuous life into a solid certainty of

resurrection life. The former is vague and powerless. It is impossible

to conceive of the future with vividness unless as a bodily life. And

this is the strength of the Christian conception of the future life,

that corporeity is the end and goal of the redeemed man.

It changes terror and awe into joy, and opens up a future in which He

is.

We shall be with Him.

We shall be like Him.

Now we can go back to all these incomplete analogies and use them

confidently. Our faith does not rest upon them but upon what has

actually been done on this earth.

Christ is the First fruits of them that slept.' What will the harvest

be!

As the single little seed is poor and small by the side of the gorgeous

flower that comes from it; so will be the change. God giveth it a body

as it hath pleased Him.'

How then to think of death for ourselves and for those who are gone?

Thankfully and hopefully.

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THE RESURRECTION MORNING

The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet

dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the

sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the

other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken

away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have

laid Him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came

to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did

outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down,

and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then

cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and

seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about His head,

not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by

itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the

sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the

scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples

went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the

sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into

the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the

head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And

they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them,

Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have

laid Him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw

Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her,

Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing Him to be

the gardener, saith unto Him, Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell

me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away. Jesus saith unto

her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni; which is to

say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch Me not; for I am not yet

ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I

ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.

Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord,

and that He had spoken these things unto her.'--JOHN xx. 1-18.

John's purpose in his narrative of the resurrection is not only to

establish the fact, but also to depict the gradual growth of faith in

it, among the disciples. The two main incidents in this passage, the

visit of Peter and John to the tomb and the appearance of our Lord to

Mary, give the dawning of faith before sight and the rapturous faith

born of sight. In the remainder of the chapter are two more instances

of faith following vision, and the teaching of the whole is summed up

in Christ's words to the doubter, Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast

believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed!'

I. The open sepulchre and the bewildered alarm it excited. The act of

resurrection took place before sunrise. At midnight,' probably, the

Bridegroom came.' It was fitting that He who was to scatter the

darkness of the grave should rise while darkness covered the earth, and

that no eye should behold how' that dead was raised up.' The earthquake

and the descent of angels and the rolling away of the stone were after

the tomb was empty.

John's note of time seems somewhat earlier than that of the other

Gospels, but is not so much so as to require the supposition that Mary

preceded the other women. She appears alone here, because the reason

for mentioning her at all is to explain how Peter and John knew of the

empty tomb, and she alone had been the informant. In these Eastern

lands, as it began to dawn,' very early at the rising of the sun,' and

while it was yet dark,' are times very near each other, and Mary may

have reached the sepulchre a little before the others. Her own words,

We know not,' show that she had spoken with others who had seen the

empty grave. We must therefore suppose that she had with the others

come to it, seen that the sacred corpse was gone and their spices

useless, exchanged hurried words of alarm and bewilderment, and then

had hastened away before the appearance of the angels.

The impulse to tell the leaders of the forlorn band the news, which she

thinks to be so bad, was womanly and natural. It was not hope, but

wonder and sorrow that quickened her steps as she ran through the still

morning to find them. Whether they were in one house or not is

uncertain; but, at all events, Peter's denial had not cut him off from

his brethren, and the two who were so constantly associated before and

afterwards were not far apart that morning. The disciple who had stood

by the Cross to almost the last had an open heart, and probably an open

house for the denier. Restore such an one, . . . considering thyself.'

Mary had seen the tomb empty, and springs to the conclusion that

they'--some unknown persons--have taken away the dead body, which, with

clinging love that tries to ignore death, she still calls the Lord.'

Possibly she may have thought that the resting-place in Joseph's new

sepulchre was only meant for temporary shelter (ver. 15). At all events

the corpse was gone, and the fact suggested no hope to her. How often

do we, in like manner, misinterpret as dark what is really pregnant

with light, and blindly attribute to them' what Jesus does! A tone of

mind thus remote from anticipation of the great fact is a precious

proof of the historical truth of the resurrection; for here was no soil

in which hallucinations would spring, and such people would not have

believed Him risen unless they had seen Him living.

II. Peter and John at the tomb, the dawning of faith, and the

continuance of bewildered wonder. In the account, we may observe,

first, the characteristic conduct of each of the two. Peter is first to

set out, and John follows, both men doing according to their kind. The

younger runs faster than his companion. He looked into the tomb, and

saw the wrappings lying; but the reverent awe which holds back finer

natures kept him from venturing in. Peter is not said to have looked

before entering. He loved with all his heart, but his love was

impetuous and practical, and he went straight in, and felt no reason

why he should pause. His boldness encouraged his friend, as the example

of strong natures does. Some of my readers will recall Bushnell's noble

sermon on Unconscious Influence' from this incident, and I need say no

more about it.

Observe, too, the further witness of the folded grave-clothes. John

from outside had not seen the napkin, lying carefully rolled up apart

from the other cloths. It was probably laid in a part of the tomb

invisible from without. But the careful disposal of these came to him,

when he saw them, with a great flash of illumination. There had been no

hurried removal.

Here had been no hostile hands, or there would not have been this

deliberation; nor friendly hands, or there would not have been such

dishonour to the sacred dead as to carry away the body nude. What did

it mean? Could He Himself have done for Himself what He had bade them

do for Lazarus? Could He have laid aside the garments of the grave as

needing them no more? They have taken away'--what if it were not they'

but He? No trace of hurry or struggle was there. He did not go out with

haste, nor go by flight,' but calmly, deliberately, in the majesty of

His lordship over death, He rose from His slumber and left order in the

land of confusion.

Observe, too, the birth of the Apostle's faith. John connects it with

the sight of the folded garments. Believed' here must mean more than

recognition of the fact that the grave was empty. The next clause seems

to imply that it means belief in the resurrection. The scripture, which

they knew' as scripture, was for John suddenly interpreted, and he was

lifted out of the ignorance of its meaning, which till that moment he

had shared with his fellow-disciples. Their failure to understand

Christ's frequent distinct prophecies that He would rise again the

third day has been thought incredible, but is surely intelligible

enough if we remember how unexampled such a thing was, and how

marvellous is our power of hearing and yet not hearing the plainest

truth. We all in the course of our lives are lost in astonishment when

things befall us which we have been plainly told will befall. The

fulfilment of all divine promises (and threatenings) is a surprise, and

no warnings beforehand teach one tithe so clearly as experience.

John believed, but Peter still was in the dark. Again the former had

outrun his friend. His more sensitive nature, not to say his deeper

love--for that would be unjust, since their love differed in quality

more than in degree--had gifted him with a more subtle and

swifter-working perception. Perhaps if Peter's heart had not been

oppressed by his sin, he would have been readier to feel the sunshine

of the wonderful hope. We condemn ourselves to the shade when we deny

our Lord by deed or word.

III. The first appearance of the Lord, and revelation of the new form

of intercourse. Nothing had been said of Mary's return to the tomb; but

how could she stay away? The disciples might go, but she lingered,

woman-like, to indulge in the bitter-sweet of tears. Eyes so filled are

more apt to see angels. No wonder that these calm watchers, in their

garb of purity and joy, had not been seen by the two men. The laws of

such appearance are not those of ordinary optics. Spiritual

susceptibility and need determine who shall see angels, and who shall

see but the empty place. Wonder and adoration held these bright forms

there. They had hovered over the cradle and stood by the shepherds at

Bethlehem, but they bowed in yet more awestruck reverence at the grave,

and death revealed to them a deeper depth of divine love.

The presence of angels was a trifle to Mary, who had only one

thought--the absence of her Lord. Surely that touch in her unmoved

answer, as if speaking to men, is beyond the reach of art. She says My

Lord' now, and I know not,' but otherwise repeats her former words,

unmoved by any hope caught from John. Her clinging love needed more

than an empty grave and folded clothes arid waiting angels to stay its

tears, and she turned indifferently and wearily away from the

interruption of the question to plunge again into her sorrow.

Chrysostom suggests that she turned herself' because she saw in the

angels' looks that they saw Christ suddenly appearing behind her; but

the preceding explanation seems better. Her not knowing Jesus might be

accounted for by her absorbing grief. One who looked at white-robed

angels, and saw nothing extraordinary, would give but a careless glance

at the approaching figure, and might well fail to recognise Him. But

probably, as in the case of the two travellers to Emmaus, her eyes were

holden,' and the cause of non-recognition was not so much a change in

Jesus as an operation on her.

Be that as it may, it is noteworthy that His voice, which was

immediately to reveal Him, at first suggested nothing to her; and even

His gentle question, with the significant addition to the angels'

words, in Whom seekest thou?' which indicated His knowledge that her

tears fell for some person dear and lost, only made her think of Him as

being the gardener,' and therefore probably concerned in the removal of

the body. If He were so, He would be friendly; and so she ventured her

pathetic petition, which does not name Jesus (so full is her mind of

the One, that she thinks everybody must know whom she means), and which

so overrated her own strength in saying, I will take Him away,' The

first words of the risen Christ are on His lips yet to all sad hearts.

He seeks our confidences, and would have us tell Him the occasions of

our tears. He would have us recognise that all our griefs and all our

desires point to one Person--Himself--as the one real Object of our

seeking,' whom finding, we need weep no more.

Verse 16 tells us that Mary turned herself to see Him when He next

spoke, so that, at the close of her first answer to Him, she must have

once more resumed her gaze into the tomb, as if she despaired of the

newcomer giving the help she had asked.

Who can say anything about that transcendent recognition, in which all

the stooping love of the risen Lord is smelted into one word, and the

burst of rapture, awe, astonishment, and devotion pours itself through

the narrow channel of one other? If this narrative is the work of some

anonymous author late in the second century, he is indeed a Great

Unknown,' and has managed to imagine one of the two or three most

pathetic situations' in literature. Surely it is more reasonable to

suppose him no obscure genius, but a well-known recorder of what he had

seen, and knew for fact. Christ's calling by name ever reveals His

loving presence. We may be sure that He knows us by name, and we should

reply by the same swift cry of absolute submission as sprung to Mary's

lips. Rabboni! Master!' is the fit answer to His call.

But Mary's exclamation was imperfect in that it expressed the

resumption of no more than the old bond, and her gladness needed

enlightenment. Things were not to be as they had been. Christ's Mary!'

had indeed assured her of His faithful remembrance and of her present

place in His love; but when she clung to His feet she was seeking to

keep what she had to learn to give up. Therefore Jesus, who invited the

touch which was to establish faith and banish doubt (Luke xxiv. 39;

John xx. 27), bids her unclasp her hands, and gently instils the ending

of the blessed past by opening to her the superior joys of the begun

future. His words contain for us all the very heart of our possible

relation to Him, and teach us that we need envy none who companied with

Him here. His ascension to the Father is the condition of our truest

approach to Him. His prohibition encloses a permission. Touch Me not!

for I am not yet ascended,' implies When I am, you may.'

Further, the ascended Christ is still our Brother. Neither the mystery

of death nor the impending mystery of dominion broke the tie. Again,

the Resurrection is the beginning of Ascension, and is only then

rightly understood when it is considered as the first upward step to

the throne. I ascend,' not I have risen, and will soon leave you,' as

if the Ascension only began forty days after on Olivet. It is already

in process. Once more the ascended Christ, our Brother still, and

capable of the touch of reverent love, is yet separated from us by the

character, even while united to us by the fact, of His filial and

dependent relation to God. He cannot say Our Father' as if standing on

the common human ground. He is Son' as we are not, and we are sons'

through Him, and can only call God our Father because He is Christ's.

Such were the immortal hopes and new thoughts which Mary hastened from

the presence of her recovered Lord to bring to the disciples. Fragrant

though but partially understood, they were like half-opened blossoms

from the tree of life planted in the midst of that garden, to bloom

unfading, and ever disclosing new beauty in believing hearts till the

end of time.

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THE RISEN LORD'S CHARGE AND GIFT

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto yon: as My Father hath

sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on

them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins

ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain,

they are retained.'--JOHN xx. 21-23.

The day of the Resurrection had been full of strange rumours, and of

growing excitement. As evening fell, some of the disciples, at any

rate, gathered together, probably in the upper room. They were brave,

for in spite of the Jews they dared to assemble; they were timid, for

they barred themselves in for fear of the Jews.' No doubt in little

groups they were eagerly discussing what had happened that day. Fuel

was added to the fire by the return of the two from Emmaus. And then,

at once, the buzz of conversation ceased, for He Himself, with His

human air,' stood there in the midst, with the quiet greeting on His

lips, which might have come from any casual stranger, and minimised the

separation that was now ending: Peace be unto you!'

We have two accounts of that evening's interview which remarkably

supplement each other. They deal with two different parts of it. John

begins where Luke ends. The latter Evangelist dwells mainly on the

disciples' fears that it was some ghostly appearance that they saw, and

on the removal of these by the sight, and perhaps the touch, of the

hands and the feet. John says nothing of the terror, but Luke's account

explains John's statement that He showed them His hands and His side,'

and that, Then were the disciples glad,' the joy expelling the fear.

Luke's account also, by dwelling on the first part of the interview,

explains what else is unexplained in John's narrative, viz. the

repetition of the salutation, Peace be unto you!' Our Lord thereby

marked off the previous portion of the conversation as being separate,

and a whole in itself. Their doubts were dissipated, and now something

else was to begin. They who were sure of the risen Lord, and had had

communion with Him, were capable of receiving a deeper peace, and so

Jesus said to them again, Peace be unto you!' and thereby inaugurated

the second part of the interview.

Luke's account also helps us in another and very important way. John

simply says that the disciples were gathered together,' and that might

mean the Eleven only. Luke is more specific, and tells us what is of

prime importance for understanding the whole incident, that the

Eleven. . . and they that were with them' were assembled. This

interview, the crown of the appearances on Easter Day, is marked as

being an interview with the assembled body of disciples, whom the Lord,

having scattered their doubts, and laid the deep benediction of His

peace upon their hearts, then goes on to invest with a sacred mission,

As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you'; to equip them with the

needed power, Receive ye the Holy Ghost'; and to unfold to them the

solemn issues of their work, Whose sins ye remit they are remitted; and

whose sins ye retain they are retained.' The message of that Easter

evening is for us all; and so I ask you to look at these three points.

I. The Christian Mission.

I have already said that the clear understanding of the persons to whom

the words were spoken, goes far to interpret the significance of the

words. Here we have at the very beginning, the great thought that every

Christian man and woman is sent by Jesus. The possession of what

preceded this charge is the thing, and the only thing, that fits a man

to receive it, and whoever possesses these is thereby despatched into

the world as being Christ's envoy and representative. And what are

these preceding experiences? The vision of the risen Christ, the touch

of His hands, the peace that He breathed over believing souls, the

gladness that sprang like a sunny fountain in the hearts that had been

so dry and dark. Those things constituted the disciples' qualification

for being sent, and these things were themselves--even apart from the

Master's words--their sending out on their future life's-work. Thus,

whoever--and thank God I am addressing many who come under the

category!--whoever has seen the Lord, has been in touch with Him, and

has felt his heart filled with gladness, is the recipient of this great

commission. There is no question here of the prerogative of a class,

nor of the functions of an order; it is a question of the universal

aspect of the Christian life in its relation to the Master who sends,

and the world into which it is sent.

We Nonconformists pride ourselves upon our freedom from what we call

sacerdotalism.' Ay! and we Nonconformists are quite willing to assert

our priesthood in opposition to the claims of a class, and are as

willing to forget it, should the question of the duties of the priest

come into view. You do not believe in priests, but a great many of you

believe that it is ministers that are sent,' and that you have no

charge. Officialism is the dry-rot of all the Churches, and is found as

rampant amongst democratic Nonconformists as amongst the more

hierarchical communities. Brethren! you are included in Christ's words

of sending on this errand, if you are included in this greeting of

Peace be unto you!' I send,' not the clerical order, not the priest,

but you,' because you have seen the Lord, and been glad, and heard the

low whisper of His benediction creeping into your hearts.

Mark, too, how our Lord reveals much of Himself, as well as of our

position, when He thus speaks. For He assumes here the royal tone, and

claims to possess as absolute authority over the lives and work of all

Christian people as the Father exercised when He sent the Son. But we

must further ask ourselves the question, what is the parallel that our

Lord here draws, not only between His action in sending us, and the

Father's action in sending Him, but also between the attitude of the

Son who was sent, and of the disciples whom He sends? And the answer is

this--the work of Jesus Christ is continued by, prolonged in, and

carried on henceforward through, the work that He lays upon His

servants. Mark the exact expression that our Lord here uses. As My

Father hath sent,' that is a past action, continuing its consequences

in the present. It is not as My Father did send once,' but as My Father

hath sent,' which means is also at present sending,' and continues to

send. Which being translated into less technical phraseology is just

this, that we here have our Lord presenting to us the thought that,

though in a new form, His work continues during the ages, and is now

being wrought through His servants. What He does by another, He does by

Himself. We Christian men and women do not understand our function in

the world, unless we have realised this: Now, then, we are ambassadors

for Christ' and His interests and His work are entrusted to our hands.

How shall the servants continue and carry on the work of the Master?

The chief way to do it is by proclaiming everywhere that finished work

on which the world's hopes depend. But note,--as My Father hath sent

Me, so send I you,'--then we are not only to carry on His work in the

world, but if one might venture to say so, we are to reproduce His

attitude towards God and the world. He was sent to be the Light of the

world'; and so are we. He was sent to seek and to save that which was

lost'; so are we. He was sent not to do His own will, but the will of

the Father that sent Him; so are we. He took upon Himself with all

cheerfulness the office to which He was appointed, and said, My meat is

to do the will of Him that sent Me,--and to finish His work'; and that

must be our voice too. He was sent to pity, to look upon the multitudes

with compassion, to carry to them the healing of His touch, and the

sympathy of His heart; so must we. We are the representatives of Jesus

Christ, and if I might dare to use such a phrase, He is to be

incarnated again in the hearts, and manifested again in the lives, of

His servants. Many weak eyes, that would be dazzled and hurt if they

were to gaze on the sun, may look at the clouds cradled by its side,

and dyed with its lustre, and learn something of the radiance and the

glory of the illuminating light from the illuminated vapour. And thus,

as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.'

Now let us turn to

II. The Christian Equipment.

He breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost!' The

symbolical action reminds us of the Creation story, when into the

nostrils was breathed the breath of life, and man became a living

soul.' The symbol is but a symbol, but what it teaches us is that every

Christian man who has passed through the experiences which make him

Christ's envoy, receives the equipment of a new life, and that that

life is the gift of the risen Lord. This Prometheus came from the dead

with the spark of life guarded in His pierced hands, and He bestowed it

upon us; for the Spirit of life, which is the Spirit of Christ, is

granted to all Christian men. Dear brethren! we have not lived up to

the realities of our Christian confession, unless into our death has

come, and there abides, this life derived from Jesus Himself, the

communication of which goes along with all faith in Him.

But the gift which Jesus brought to that group of timid disciples in

the upper room did not make superfluous the further gift on the day of

Pentecost. The communication of the divine Spirit to men runs parallel

with, depends on, and follows, the revelation of divine truth, so the

ascended Lord gave more of that life to the disciples, who had been

made capable of more of it by the fact of beholding His ascension, than

the risen Lord could give on that Easter Day. But whilst thus there are

measures and degrees, the life is given to every believer in

correspondence with the clearness and the contents of his faith.

It is the power that will fit any of us for the work for which we are

sent into the world. If we are here to represent Jesus Christ, and if

it is true of us that as He is, so are we, in this world,' that

likeness can only come about by our receiving into our spirits a

kindred life which will effloresce and manifest itself to men in

kindred beauty of foliage and of fruit. If we are to be the lights of

the world,' our lamps must be fed with oil. If we are to be Christ's

representatives, we must have Christ's life in us. Here, too, is the

only source of strength and life to us Christian people, when we look

at the difficulties of our task and measure our own feebleness against

the work that lies before us. I suppose no man has ever tried honestly

to be what Christ wished him to be amidst his fellows, whether as

preacher or teacher or guide in any fashion, who has not hundreds of

times clasped his hands in all but despair, and said, Who is sufficient

for these things?' That is the temper into which the power will come.

The rivers run in the valleys, and it is the lowly sense of our own

unfitness for the task which yet presses upon us, and imperatively

demands to be done, that makes us capable of receiving that divine

gift.

It is for lack of it that so much of so-called Christian effort' comes

to nothing. The priests may pile the wood upon the altar, and compass

it all day long with vain cries, and nothing happens. It is not till

the fire comes down from heaven that sacrifice and altar and wood and

water in the trench, are licked up and converted into fiery light. So,

dear brethren! it is because the Christian Church as a whole, and we as

individual members of it, so imperfectly realise the A B C of our

faith, our absolute dependence on the inbreathed life of Jesus Christ,

to fit us for any of our work, that so much of our work is ploughing

the sands, and so often we labour for vanity and spend our strength for

nought. What is the use of a mill full of spindles and looms until the

fire-born impulse comes rushing through the pipes? Then they begin to

move.

Let me remind you, too, that the words which our Lord here employs

about these great gifts, when accurately examined, do lead us to the

thought that we, even we, are not altogether passive in the reception

of that gift. For the expression, Receive ye the Holy Ghost' might,

with more completeness of signification, be rendered, take ye the Holy

Ghost.' True, the outstretched hand is nothing, unless the giving hand

is stretched out too. True, the open palm and the clutching fingers

remain empty, unless the open palm above drops the gift. But also true,

things in the spiritual realm that are given have to be asked for,

because asking opens the heart for their entrance. True, that gift was

given once for all, and continuously, but the appropriation and the

continual possession of it largely depend upon ourselves. There must be

desire before there can be possession. If a man does not take his

pitcher to the fountain the pitcher remains empty, though the fountain

never ceases to spring. There must be taking by patient waiting. The

old Friends had a lovely phrase when they spoke about waiting for the

springing of the life.' If we hold out a tremulous hand, and our cup is

not kept steady, the falling water will not enter it, and much will be

spilt upon the ground. Wait on the Lord, and the life will rise like a

tide in the heart. There must be a taking by the faithful use of what

we possess. To him that hath shall be given.' There must be a taking by

careful avoidance of what would hinder. In the winter weather the water

supply sometimes fails in a house. Why? Because there is a plug of ice

in the service-pipe. Some of us have a plug of ice, and so the water

has not come,

Take the Holy Spirit!'

Now, lastly, we have here

III. The Christian power over sin.

I am not going to enter upon controversy. The words which close our

Lord's great charge here have been much misunderstood by being

restricted. It is eminently necessary to remember here that they were

spoken to the whole community of Christian souls. The harm that has

been done by their restriction to the so-called priestly function of

absolution has been, not only the monstrous claims which have been

thereon founded, but quite as much the obscuration of the large effects

that follow from the Christian discharge by all believers of the office

of representing Jesus Christ.

We must interpret these words in harmony with the two preceding points,

the Christian mission and the Christian equipment. So interpreted, they

lead us to a very plain thought which I may put thus. This same Apostle

tells us in his letter that Jesus Christ was manifested to take away

sin.' His work in this world, which we are to continue, was to put away

sin by the sacrifice of Himself.' We continue that work when,--as we

have all, if Christians, the right to do--we lift up our voices with

triumphant confidence, and call upon our brethren to behold the Lamb of

God which taketh away the sin of the world!' The proclamation has a

twofold effect, according as it is received or rejected; to him who

receives it his sins melt away, and the preacher of forgiveness through

Christ has the right to say to his brother, Thy sins are forgiven

because thou believest on Him.' The rejecter or the neglecter binds his

sin upon himself by his rejection or neglect. The same message is, as

the Apostle puts it, a savour of life unto life, or of death unto

death.' These words are the best commentary on this part of my text.

The same heat, as the old Fathers used to say, softens wax and hardens

clay.' The message of the word will either couch a blind eye, and let

in the light, or draw another film of obscuration over the visual orb.

And so, Christian men and women have to feel that to them is entrusted

a solemn message, that they walk in the world charged with a mighty

power, that by the preaching of the Word, and by their own utterance of

the forgiving mercy of the Lord Jesus, they may remit' or retain' not

only the punishment of sin, but sin itself. How tender, how diligent,

how reverent, how--not bowed down, but--erect under the weight of our

obligations, we should be, if we realised that solemn thought!

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THOMAS AND JESUS

And after eight days, again His disciples were within, and Thomas with

them. Then came Jesus.'--JOHN xx. 26.

There is nothing more remarkable about the narrative of the

resurrection, taken as a whole, than the completeness with which our

Lord's appearances met all varieties of temperament, condition, and

spiritual standing. Mary, the lover; Peter, the penitent; the two

disciples on the way to Emmaus, the thinkers; Thomas, the stiff

unbeliever--the presence of the Christ is enough for them all; it cures

those that need cure, and gladdens those that need gladdening. I am not

going to do anything so foolish as to try to tell over again, less

vividly, this well-known story. We all remember its outlines, I

suppose: the absence of Thomas from Christ's first meeting with the

assembled disciples on Easter evening; the dogged disbelief with which

he met their testimony; his arrogant assumption of the right to lay

down the conditions on which he should believe, and Christ's gracious

acceptance of the conditions; the discovery when they were offered that

they were not needful; the burst of glad conviction which lifted him to

the loftiest height reached while Christ was on earth, and then the

summing up of all in our Lord's words--Blessed are they that have not

seen and yet have believed!'--the last Beatitude, that links us and all

the generations yet to come with the story, and is like a finger

pointing to it, as containing very special lessons for them all.

I simply seek to try to bring out the force and instructiveness of the

story. The first point is--

I. The isolation that misses the sight of the Christ.

Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.' No

reason is assigned. The absence may have been purely accidental, but

the specification of Thomas as one of the Twelve,' seems to suggest

that his absence was regarded by the Evangelist as a dereliction of

apostolic duty; and the cause of it may be found, I think, with

reasonable probability, if we take into account the two other facts

that the same Evangelist records concerning this Apostle. One is his

exclamation, in which a constitutional tendency to accept the blackest

possibilities as certainties, blends very strangely and beautifully

with an intense and brave devotion to his Master. Let us also go,' said

Thomas, when Christ announced His intention, but a few days before the

Passion, of returning to the grave of Lazarus, that we may die with

Him.' He is going to His death, that I am sure of, and I am going to be

beside Him even in His death.' A constitutional pessimist! The only

other notice that we have of him is that he broke in--with apparent

irreverence which was not real,--with a brusque contradiction of

Christ's saying that they knew the way, and they knew His goal. Lord!

we know not whither Thou goest'--there spoke pained love fronting the

black prospect of eternal separation,--and how can we know the

way?'--there spoke almost impatient despair.

So is not that the kind of man who on the Resurrection day would have

been saying to himself, even more decidedly and more bitterly than the

two questioning thinkers on the road to Emmaus had said it, We trusted

that this had been He, but it is all over now'? The keystone was struck

out of the arch, and this brick tumbled away of itself. The hub was

taken out of the wheel, and the spokes fell apart. The divisive

tendency was begun, as I have had occasion to remark in other sermons.

Thomas did the very worst thing that a melancholy man can do, went away

to brood in a corner by himself, and so to exaggerate all his

idiosyncrasies, to distort the proportion of truth, to hug his despair,

by separating himself from his fellows. Therefore he lost what they

got, the sight of the Lord. He was not with them when Jesus came.'

Would he not have been better in the upper room than gloomily turning

over in his mind the dissolution of the fair company and the shipwreck

of all his hopes?

May we not learn a lesson? I venture to apply these words, dear

friends, to our gatherings for worship. The worst thing that a man can

do when disbelief, or doubt, or coldness shrouds his sky, and blots out

the stars, is to go away alone and shut himself up with his own,

perhaps morbid, or, at all events, disturbing thoughts. The best thing

that he can do is to go amongst his fellows. If the sermon does not do

him any good, the prayers and the praises and the sense of brotherhood

will help him. If a fire is going out, draw the dying coals close

together, and they will make each other break into a flame. One great

reason for some of the less favourable features that modern

Christianity presents, is that men are beginning to think less than

they ought to do, and less than they used to do, of the obligation and

the blessing, whatever their spiritual condition, of gathering together

for the worship of God. But, further, there is a far wider thought than

that here, which I have already referred to, and which I do not need to

dwell upon, namely, that, although, of course, there are very plain

limits to be put to the principle, yet it is a principle, that solitude

is not the best medicine for any disturbed or saddened soul. It is true

that solitude is the mother-country of the strong,' and that unless we

are accustomed to live very much alone, we shall not live very much

with God. But on the other hand, if you cut yourself off from the

limiting, and therefore developing, society of your fellows, you will

rust, you will become what they call eccentric. Your idiosyncrasies

will swell into monstrosities, your peculiarities will not be subjected

to the gracious process of pruning which society with your fellows, and

especially with Christian hearts, will bring to them. And in every way

you will be more likely to miss the Christ than if you were kindly with

your kind, and went up to the house of God in company.

Take the next point that is here:

II. The stiff incredulity that prescribed terms.

When Thomas came back to his brethren, they met him with the witness

that they had seen the Lord, and he met them as they had met the

witnesses that brought the same message to them. They had thought the

women's words idle tales.' Thomas gives them back their own

incredulity. I need not remind you of what I have already had occasion

to say, how much this frank acknowledgment that none of these, who were

afterwards to be witnesses of the Resurrection to the world, accepted

testimony to the Resurrection as enough to convince them, enhances the

worth of their testimony, and how entirely it shatters the conception

that the belief in the Resurrection was a mist that rose from the

undrained swamps of their own heated imaginations.

But notice how Thomas exaggerated their position, and took up a far

more defiant tone than any of them had done. He is called doubting

Thomas.' He was no doubter. Flat, frank, dogged disbelief, and not

hesitation or doubt, was his attitude. The very form in which he puts

his requirement shows how he was hugging his unbelief, and how he had

no idea that what he asked would ever be granted. Unless I have

so-and-so I will not,' indicates an altogether spiritual attitude from

what If I have so-and-so, I will,' would have indicated. The one is the

language of willingness to be persuaded, the other is a token of a

determination to be obstinate. What right had he--what right has any

man--to say, So-and-so must be made plain to me, or I will not accept a

certain truth'? You have a right to ask for satisfactory evidence; you

have no right to make up your minds beforehand what that must

necessarily be. Thomas showed his hand not only in the form of his

expression, not only in his going beyond his province and prescribing

the terms of surrender, but also in the terms which he prescribed.

True, he is only saying to the other Apostles, I will give in if I have

what you had,' for Jesus Christ had said to them, Handle Me and see!'

But although thus they could say nothing in opposition, it is clear

that he was asking more than was needful, and more than he had any

right to ask. And he shows his hand, too, in another way. I will not

believe!'--what business had he, what business have you, to bring any

question of will into the act of belief or credence? Thus, in all these

four points, the form of the demand, the fact of the demand, the

substance of the demand, and the implication in it that to give or

withhold assent was a matter to be determined by inclination, this man

stands not as an example of a doubter, but as an example, of which

there are too many copies amongst us always, of a determined

disbeliever and rejecter.

So I come to the third point, and that is:

III. The revelation that turned the denier into a rapturous confessor.

What a strange week that must have been between the two Sundays--that

of the Resurrection and the next! Surely it would have been kinder if

the Christ had not left the disciples, with their new-found, tremulous,

raw conviction. It would have been less kind if He had been with them,

for there is nothing that is worse for the solidity of a man's

spiritual development than that it should be precipitated, and new

thoughts must have time to take the shape of the mind into which they

come, and to mould the shape of the mind into which they come. So they

were left to quiet reflection, to meditation, to adjust their thoughts,

to get to understand the bearings of the transcendent fact. And as a

mother will go a little way off from her little child, in order to

encourage it to try to walk, they were left alone to make experiments

of that self-reliance which was also reliance on Him, and which was to

be their future and their permanent condition. So the week passed, and

they became steadier and quieter, and began to be familiar with the

thought, and to see some glimpses of what was involved in the mighty

fact, of a risen Saviour. Then He comes back again, and when He comes

He singles out the unbeliever, leaving the others alone for the moment,

and He gives him back, granted, his arrogant conditions. How much

ashamed of them Thomas must have been when he heard them quoted by the

Lord's own lips! How different they would sound from what they had

sounded when, in the self-sufficiency of his obstinate determination,

he had blurted them out in answer to his brethren's testimony! There is

no surer way of making a good man ashamed of his wild words than just

to say them over again to him when he is calm and cool. Christ's

granting the request was Christ's sharpest rebuke of the request. But

there was not only the gracious and yet chastising granting of the

foolish desire, but there was a penetrating warning: Be not faithless,

but believing.' What did that mean? Well, it meant this: It is not a

question of evidence, Thomas; it is a question of disposition. Your

incredulity is not due to your not having enough to warrant your

belief, but to your tendency and attitude of mind and heart.' There is

light enough in the sun; it is our eyes that are wrong, and deep below

most questions, even of intellectual credence, lies the disposition of

the man. The ultimate truths of religion cannot be matters of

demonstration any more than the fundamental truths of any science can

be proved; any more than Euclid's axioms can be demonstrated; any more

than the sense of beauty or the ear for music depend on the

understanding. Be not faithless, but believing.' The eye that is sound

will see the light.

And there is another lesson here. The words of our Lord, literally

rendered, are, become not faithless, but believing.' There are two

tendencies at work with us, and the one or the other will progressively

lay hold upon us, and we shall increasingly yield to it. You can

cultivate the habit of incredulity until you descend into the class of

the faithless; or you can cultivate the opposite habit and disposition

until you rise to the high level of a settled and sovereign belief.

It is clear that Thomas did not reach forth his hand and touch. The

rush of instantaneous conviction swept him along and bore him far away

from the state of mind which had asked for such evidence. Our Lord's

words must have pierced his heart, as he thought: Then He was here all

the while; He heard my wild words; He loves me still.' As Nathanael,

when he knew that Jesus had seen him under the fig-tree, broke out with

the exclamation, Rabbi! Thou art the Son of God,' so Thomas, smitten as

by a lightning flash with the sense of Jesus' all-embracing knowledge

and all-forgiving love, forgets his incredulity and breaks into the

rapturous confession, the highest ever spoken while He was on earth: My

Lord and my God!' So swiftly did his whole attitude change. It was as

when the eddying volumes of smoke in some great conflagration break

into sudden flame, the ruddier and hotter, the blacker they were. Sight

may have made Thomas believe that Jesus was risen, but it was something

other and more inward than sight that opened his lips to cry, My Lord

and my God!' Finally, we note--

IV. A last Beatitude that extends to all generations.

Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.' I need not

do more than just in a sentence remind you that we shall very poorly

understand either this saying or this Gospel or the greater part of the

New Testament, if we do not make it very clear to our minds that

believing' is not credence only but trust. The object of the

Christian's faith is not a proposition; it is not a dogma nor a truth,

but a Person. And the act of faith is not an acceptance of a given

fact, a Resurrection or any other, as true, but it is a reaching out of

the whole nature to Him and a resting upon Him. I have said that Thomas

had no right to bring his will to bear on the act of belief, considered

as the intellectual act of accepting a thing as true. But Christian

faith, being more than intellectual belief, does involve the activity

of the will. Credence is the starting-point, but it is no more. There

may be belief in the truth of the gospel and not a spark of faith in

the Christ revealed by the gospel.

Even in regard to that lower kind of belief, the assent which does not

rest on sense has its own blessing. We sometimes are ready to think

that it would have been easier to believe if we had seen with our eyes,

and our hands had handled the (incarnate) Word of Life' but that is a

mistake.

This generation, and all generations that have not seen Him, are not in

a less advantageous position in regard either to credence or to trust,

than were those that companied with Him on earth, and the blessing

Which He breathed out in that upper room comes floating down the ages

like a perfume diffused through the atmosphere, and is with us fragrant

as it was in the days of His flesh.' There is nothing in the world's

history comparable to the warmth and closeness of conscious contact

with that Christ, dead for nearly nineteen centuries now, which is the

experience today of thousands of Christian men and women. All other

names pass, and as they recede through the ages, thickening veils of

oblivion, mists of forgetfulness, gather round them. They melt away

into the fog and are forgotten. Why is it that one Person, and one

Person only, triumphs even in this respect over space and time, and is

the same close Friend with whom millions of hearts are in loving touch,

as He was to those that gathered around Him upon earth?

What is the blessing of this faith that does not rest on sense, and

only in a small measure on testimony or credence? Part of its blessing

is that it delivers us from the tyranny of sense, sets us free from the

crowding oppression of things seen and temporal'; draws back the veil

and lets us behold the things that are unseen and eternal.' Faith is

sight, the sight of the inward eye. It is the direct perception of the

unseen. It sees Him who is invisible. The vision which is given to the

eye of faith is more real in the true sense of that word, more

substantial in the true sense of that word, more reliable and more near

than that sight by which the bodily eye beholds external things. We

see, when we trust, greater things than when we look. The blessing of

blessings is that the faith which triumphs over the things seen and

temporal, brings into every life the presence of the unseen Lord.

Brethren! do not confound credence with trust. Remember that trust does

involve an element of will. Ask yourselves if the things seen and

temporal are great enough, lasting enough, real enough to satisfy you,

and then remember whose lips said, Become not faithless but believing,'

and breathed His last Beatitude upon those who have not seen and yet

have believed.' We may all have that blessing lying like dew upon us,

amidst the dust and scorching heat of the things seen and temporal. We

shall have it, if our heart's trust is set on Him, whom one of the

listeners on that Sunday spoke of long after, in words which seem to

echo that promise, as Jesus in whom though now ye see Him not, yet

believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving

the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.'

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THE SILENCE OF SCRIPTURE

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples,

which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye

might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that

believing ye might have life through His name.'--JOHN xx. 30, 31.

It is evident that these words were originally the close of this

Gospel, the following chapter being an appendix, subsequently added by

the writer himself. In them we have the Evangelist's own acknowledgment

of the incompleteness of his Gospel, and his own statement of the

purpose which he had in view in composing it. That purpose was first of

all a doctrinal one, and he tells us that in carrying it out he omitted

many things that he could have put in if he had chosen. But that

doctrinal purpose was subordinate to a still further aim. His object

was not only to present the truth that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of

God, but to present it in such a way as to induce his readers to

believe in that Christ. And he desired that they might have faith in

order that they might have life.

Now, it is a very good old canon in judging of a book that in every

work' we are to regard the writer's end,' and if that simple principle

had been applied to this Gospel, a great many of the features in it

which have led to some difficulty would have been seen to be naturally

explained by the purpose which the Evangelist had in view.

But this text may be applied very much more widely than to John's

Gospel. We may use it to point our thoughts to the strange silences and

incompletenesses of the whole of Revelation, and to the explanation of

these incompletenesses by the consideration of the purpose which it all

had in view. In that sense I desire to look at these words before us.

I. First, then, we have here set forth the incompleteness of Scripture.

Take this Gospel first. Anybody who looks at it can see that it is a

fragment. It is not meant to be a biography; it is avowedly a

selection, and a selection under the influence, as I shall have to show

you presently, of a distinct dogmatic purpose. There is nothing in it

about Christ's birth, nothing in it about His baptism, nor about His

selection of His Apostles. There is scarcely anything about the facts

of His outward life at all. There is scarcely a word about the whole of

His ministry in Galilee. There is not one of His parables, there are

only seven of His miracles before the Resurrection, and two of these

occur also in the other Evangelists. There is scarcely any of His

ethical teaching; there is not a word about the Lord's Supper.

And so I might go on enumerating many remarkable gaps in this Gospel.

Nearly half of it is taken up with the incidents of one week at the end

of His life, and the incidents of and after the Resurrection. Of the

remainder-by far the larger portion consists of several conversations

which are hung upon miracles that seem to be related principally for

the sake of these. The whole of the phenomena show us at once the

fragmentary character of this Gospel as stamped upon the very surface.

And when we turn to the other three, the same thing is true, though

less strikingly so. Why was it that in the Church, after the completion

of the Scriptural canon, there sprang up a whole host of Apocryphal

Gospels, full of childish stories of events which people felt had been

passed over with strange silence, in the teachings of the four

Evangelists: stories of His childhood, for instance, and stories about

what happened between His death and His resurrection? A great many

miracles were added to those that have been told us in Scripture. The

condensed hints of the canonical Gospels received a great expansion,

which indicated how much their silence about certain points had been

felt. What a tiny pamphlet they make! Is it not strange that the

greatest event in the world's history should be told in such brief

outline, and that here, too, the mustard seed, less than the least of

all seeds,' should have become such a great tree? Put the four Gospels

down by the side of the two thick octavo volumes, which it is the

regulation thing to write nowadays, as the biography of any man that

has a name at all, and you will feel their incompleteness as

biographies. They are but a pen-and-ink drawing of the Sun! And yet,

although they be so tiny that you might sit down and read them all in

an evening over the fire, is it not strange that they have stamped on

the mind of the world an image so deep and so sharp, of such a

character as the world never saw elsewhere? They are fragments, but

they have left a symmetrical and an unique impression on the

consciousness of the whole world.

And then, if you turn to the whole Book, the same thing is true, though

in a modified sense there. I have no time to dwell upon that fruitful

field, but the silence of Scripture is quite as eloquent as its speech.

Think, for instance, of how many things in the Bible are taken for

granted which one would not expect to be taken for granted in a book of

religious instruction. It takes for granted the being of a God. It

takes for granted our relations to Him. It takes for granted our moral

nature. In its later portions, at all events, it takes for granted the

future life. Look at how the Bible, as a whole, passes by, without one

word of explanation or alleviation, a great many of the difficulties

which gather round some of its teaching. For instance, we find no

attempt to explain the divine nature of our Lord; or the existence of

the three Persons in the Godhead. It has not a word to say in

explanation of the mystery of prayer; or of the difficulty of

reconciling the Omnipotent will of God on the one hand, with our own

free will on the other. It has not a word to explain, though many a

word to proclaim and enforce, the fact of Christ's death as the

atonement for the sins of the whole world. Observe, too, how scanty the

information on points on which the heart craves for more light. How

closely, for instance, the veil is kept over the future life! How many

questions which are not prompted by mere curiosity, our sorrow and our

love ask in vain!

Nor is the incompleteness of Scripture as a historical book less

marked. Nations and men appear on its pages abruptly, rending the

curtain of oblivion, and striding to the front of the stage for a

moment, and then they disappear, swallowed up of night. It has no care

to tell the stories of any of its heroes, except for so long as they

were the organs of that divine breath, which, breathed through the

weakest reed, makes music. The self-revelation of God, not the acts and

fortunes of even His noblest servants, is the theme of the Book. It is

full of gaps about matters that any sciolist or philosopher or

theologian would have filled up for it. There it stands, a Book unique

in the world's history, unique in what it says, and no less unique in

what it does not say.

Many other things truly did' that divine Spirit in His march through

the ages, which are not written in this book; but these are written

that ye might believe.'

II. And so that brings me next to say a word or two about the more

immediate purpose which explains all these gaps and incompletenesses.

John's Gospel, and the other three Gospels, and the whole Bible, New

Testament and Old, have this for their purpose, to produce in men's

hearts the faith in Jesus as the Christ' and as the Son of God.'

I need not speak at length about this one Gospel with any special

regard to that thought. I have already said that the Evangelist avows

that his work is a selection, that he declares that the purpose that

determined his selection was doctrinal, and that he picked out facts

which would tend to represent Jesus Christ to us in the twofold

capacity,--as the Christ, the Fulfiller of all the expectations and

promises of the Old Covenant, and as the Son of God. The one of these

titles is a name of office, the other a name of nature; the one

declares that He had come to be, and to do, all to which types and

prophecies and promises had dimly pointed, and the other declares that

He was the Eternal Word,' which in the beginning was with God and was

God,' and was manifest here upon earth to us.

This was his purpose, and this representation of Jesus Christ is that

which shapes all the facts and all the phenomena of this Gospel, from

the very first words of it to its close.

And so, although it is wide from my present subject, I may just make

one parenthetical remark, to the effect that it is ridiculous in the

face of this statement for critics' to say, as some of them do: The

author of the fourth Gospel has not told us this, that, and the other

incident in Christ's life, therefore, he did not know it.' Then some of

them will draw the conclusion that John's Gospel is not to be trusted

in the given case, because he does not give us a certain incident, and

others might draw the conclusion that the other three Evangelists are

not to be trusted because they do give it us. And the whole fabric is

built up upon a blunder, and would have been avoided if people had

listened when John said to them: I knew a great many things about Jesus

Christ, but I did not put them down here because I was not writing a

biography, but preaching a gospel; and what I wanted to proclaim was

that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.'

But now we may extend that a great deal further. It is just as true

about the whole New Testament. The four Gospels are written to tell us

these two facts about Christ. They are none of them merely biographies;

as such they are singularly deficient, as we have seen. But they are

biographies plus a doctrine; and the biography is told mainly for the

sake of carrying this twofold truth into men's understandings and

hearts, that Jesus is, first of all, the Christ, and second, the Son of

God.

And then comes the rest of the New Testament, which is nothing more

than the working out of the theoretical and practical consequence of

these great truths. All the Epistles, the Book of Revelation, and the

history of the Church, as embodied in the Acts of the Apostles,--all

these are but the consequences of that fundamental truth; and the whole

of Scripture in its later portions is but the drawing of the inferences

and the presenting of the duties that flow from the facts that Jesus is

the Christ, the Son of God.'

And what about the Old Testament? Why, this about it: that whatever may

be the conclusion as to the date and authorship of any of the books in

it,--and I am not careful to contend about these at present;--and

whatever a man may believe about the verbal prophecies which most of us

recognise there,--there is stamped unmistakably upon the whole system,

of which the Old Testament is the record, an onward-looking attitude.

It is all anticipatory of good things to come,' and of a Person who

will bring them. Sacrifice, sacred offices, such as priesthood and

kingship, and the whole history of Israel, have their faces turned to

the future. They that went before, and they that followed after, cried

"Hosanna! Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord!"' This

Christ towers up above the history of the world and the process of

revelation, like Mount Everest among the Himalayas. To that great peak

all the country on the one side runs upwards, and from it all the

valleys on the other descend; and the springs are born there which

carry verdure and life over the world.

Christ, the Son of God, is the centre of Scripture; and the Book--

whatever be the historical facts about its origin, its authorship, and

the date of the several portions of which it is composed--the Book is a

unity, because there is driven right through it, like a core of gold,

either in the way of prophecy and onward-looking anticipation, or in

the way of history and grateful retrospect, the reference to the one

Name that is above every name,' the name of the Christ, the Son of God.

And all its incompleteness, its fragmentariness, its carelessness about

persons, are intended, as are the slight parts in a skilful artist's

handiwork, to emphasise the beauty and the sovereignty of that one

central Figure on which all lights are concentrated, and on which the

painter has lavished all the resources of his art. So God--for God is

the Author of the Bible--on this great canvas has painted much in

sketchy outline, and left much unfilled in, that every eye may be fixed

on the central Figure, the Christ of God, on whose head comes down the

Dove, and round whom echoes the divine declaration: This is My Beloved

Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

But it is not merely in order to represent Jesus as the Christ of God

that these things are written, but it is that that representation may

become the object of our faith. If the intention of Scripture had been

simply to establish the fact that Jesus was the Christ and the Son of

God, it might have been done in a very different fashion. A theological

treatise would have been enough to do that. But if the object be that

men should not only accept with their understandings the truth

concerning Christ's office and nature, but that their hearts should go

out to Him, and that they should rest their sinful souls upon Him as

the Son of God and the Christ, then there is no other way to accomplish

that, but by the history of His life and the manifestation of His

heart. If the object were simply to make us know about Christ, we do

not need a Book like this; but if the object is to lead us to put our

faith in Him, then we must have what we have here, the infinitely

touching and tender Figure of Jesus Christ Himself, set before us in

all its sweetness and beauty as He lived and moved and died for us.

And so, dear friends, let me put one last word here about this part of

my subject. If this be the purpose of Scripture, then let us learn on

the one hand the wretched insufficiency of a mere orthodox creed, and

let us learn on the other hand the equal insufficiency of a mere

creedless emotion.

If the purpose of Scripture, in these Gospels, and all its parts, is

that we should believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,' that

purpose is not accomplished when we simply yield our understanding to

that truth and accept it as a great many people do. That was much more

the fault of the last generation than of this, though many of us may

still make the mistake of supposing that we are Christians because we

idly assent to--or, at least, do not deny, and so fancy that we

accept--Christian truth. But, as Luther says in one of his rough

figures, Human nature is like a drunken peasant; if you put him up on

the horse on the one side, he is sure to tumble down on the other.' And

so the reaction from the heartless, unpractical orthodoxy of half a

century ago has come with a vengeance to-day, when everybody is saying,

Oh! give me a Christianity without dogma!' Well, I say that too, about

a great many of the metaphysical subtleties which have been called

Doctrinal Christianity. But this doctrine of the nature and office of

Jesus Christ cannot be given up, and the Christianity which Christ and

His Apostles taught be retained. Do you believe that Jesus is the

Christ, the Son of God? Do you trust your soul to Him in these

characters? If you do, I think we can shake hands. If you do not,

Scripture has failed to do its work on you, and you have not reached

the point which all God's lavish revelation has been expended on the

world that you and all men might attain.

III. Now, lastly, notice the ultimate purpose of the whole.

Scripture is not given to us merely to make us know something about God

in Christ, nor only in order that we may have faith in the Christ thus

revealed to us, but for a further end--great, glorious, but, blessed be

His Name! not distant--namely, that we may have life in His name.'

Life' is deep, mystical, inexplicable by any other words than itself.

It includes pardon, holiness, well-being, immortality, Heaven; but it

is more than they all.

This life comes into our dead hearts and quickens them by union with

God. That which is joined to God lives. Each being according to its

nature, is, on condition of the divine power acting upon it. This bit

of wood upon which I put my hand, and the hand which I put upon it,

would equally crumble into nothingness if they were separated from God.

You can separate your wills and your spiritual nature from Him, and

thus separated you are dead in trespasses and in sins.' And, O brother!

the message comes to you: there is life in that great Christ, in His

name'; that is to say, in that revealed character of His by which He is

made known to us as the Christ and the Son of God.

Union with Him in His Sonship will bring life into dead hearts. He is

the true Prometheus' who has come from Heaven with fire,' the fire of

the divine Life in the reed' of His humanity, and He imparts it to us

all if we will. He lays Himself upon us, as the prophet laid himself on

the little child in the upper chamber; and lip to lip, and beating

heart to dead heart, He touches our death, and it is quickened into

life.

The condition on which that great Name will bring to us life is simply

our faith. Do you believe in Him, and trust yourself to Him, as He who

came to fulfil all that prophet, priest, and king, sacrifice, altar,

and Temple of old times prophesied and looked for? Do you trust in Him

as the Son of God who comes down to earth that we in Him might find the

immortal life which He is ready to give? If you do, then, dear

brethren! the end that God has in view in all His revelation, that

Christ had in view in His bitter Passion, has been accomplished for

you. If you do not it has not. You may admire Him, you may think

loftily of Him, you may be ready to call Him by many great and

appreciative names, but Oh! unless you have learned to see in Him the

divine Saviour of your souls, you have not seen what God means you to

see.

But if you have, then all other questions about this Book, important as

they are in their places, may settle themselves as they will; you have

got the kernel, the thing that it was meant to bring you. Many an

erudite scholar, who has studied the Bible all his life, has missed the

purpose for which it was given; and many a poor old woman in her garret

has found it. It is not meant to wrangle over, it is not meant to be

read as an interesting product of the religious consciousness, it is

not to be admired as all that remains of the literature of a nation

that had a genius for religion; but it is to be taken as being God's

great Word to the world, the record of the revelation that He has given

us in His Son. The Eternal Word is the theme of all the written word.

Have you made the jewel which is brought us in that casket your own? Is

Jesus to you the Son of the living God, believing on whom you share His

life, and become sons of God' by Him? Can you take on to your thankful

lips that triumphant and rapturous confession of the doubting

Thomas,--the flag flying on the completed roof-tree of this Gospel--My

Lord and my God'? If you can, you will receive the blessing which

Christ then promised to all of us standing beyond the limits of that

little group, who have not seen and yet have believed'--even that

eternal life which flows into our dead spirits from the Christ, the Son

of God, who is the Light of the world, and the Life of men.

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AN ELOQUENT CATALOGUE

There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and

Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of

His disciples.'--JOHN xxi. 2.

This chapter, containing the infinitely significant and pathetic

account of our Lord's appearance to these disciples by the Sea of

Tiberias, is evidently an appendix to the Gospel of John. The design of

that Gospel is complete with the previous chapter, and there is a

formal close, as of the whole book, at the end thereof. But whilst

obviously an appendix, this chapter is as obviously the work of the

same hand as wrote the Gospel. There are many minute points of identity

between the style of it and of the rest of the work, so that there can

be no difficulty or doubt as to whence it came. This enumeration of

these seven disciples, regarded as being the work of John himself,

seems to me to be significant, and to contain a good many lessons. And

I desire to turn to these now.

I. First of all, the fact that they were together is significant.

How did they come to hold together? How had they not yielded to the

temptation to seek safety by flight, which would have been the natural

course after the death of their Leader on a charge of treason against

the Roman power? The process of disintegration had begun, and we see it

going on in the conduct of the disciples before the Resurrection. The

Shepherd was smitten,' and, as a matter of course, the sheep' began to

scatter.' And yet here we find them back in Galilee, in their old

haunts, and not trying to escape by separation, which would have been

the first step suggested to ordinary men in an ordinary state of

things. But where everybody knew them, and they knew everybody, and

everybody knew them to be disciples of Jesus Christ, thither they go,

and hold together as if they had still a living centre and a uniting

bond. How did that come about? The fact that after Christ's death there

was a group of men united together simply and solely as disciples, and

exhibiting their unity as disciples conspicuously, in the face of the

men that knew them best, this forms a strange phenomenon that needs an

explanation. And there is only one explanation of it, that Jesus Christ

had risen from the dead. That drew them together once more. You cannot

build a Church on a dead Christ; and of all the proofs of the

Resurrection, I take it that there is none that it is harder for an

unbeliever to account for, in harmony with his hypothesis, than the

simple fact that Christ's disciples held together after He was dead,

and presented a united front to the world.

So, then, the fact of the group is itself significant, and we may claim

it as being a morsel of evidence for the historical veracity of the

resurrection of Jesus Christ.

II. Then the composition of this group is significant.

Taken in comparison with the original nucleus of the Church, the

calling of which we find recorded in the first chapter of this Gospel,

it is to be noticed that of the five men who made the Primitive Church,

there are three who reappear here by name--viz. Simon Peter, John and

Nathanael, and Nathanael never appears anywhere else except in these

two places. Then, note that there are two unnamed men here, two other

of His disciples'; who, I think, in all probability are the two of the

original five that we do not find named here--viz. Philip and Andrew,

Simon Peter's brother'--both of them connected with Bethsaida, the

place where probably this appearance of the risen Lord took place.

So, then, I think, the fair inference from the list before us is that

we have here the original nucleus again, the first five, with a couple

more, and the couple more are Thomas, who is called Didymus'--and we

shall see the reason for his presence in a moment--and the brother of

John, one of the first pair.

Thus, then, to the original little group that had gathered round Him at

the first, and to whom He had been so often manifested in this very

scene where they were standing now, He is revealed again. There, along

the beach, is the place where James and John and Simon and Andrew were

called from their nets three short years ago. Across yonder, on the

other side of the lake, is the bit of green grass where the thousands

were fed. Behind it is the steep slope down which the devil-possessed

herd rushed. There, over the shoulder of the hill, is the road that

leads up to Cana of Galilee, which they had trod together on that

never-to-be-forgotten first morning, and from which little village one

of the group came. They who had companied with Him all the time of His

too short fellowship, and had seen all His manifestations, were

fittingly chosen to be the recipients of this last appearance, which

was to be full of instruction as to the work of the Church, its

difficulties, its discouragements, its rewards, its final success, and

His benediction of it until the very end of time. It was not for

nothing that they who were gathered together were that first nucleus of

the Church, who received again from their Master the charge to be

fishers of men.'

And then, if we look at the list, having regard to the history of those

that make it up, it seems to me that that also brings us some valuable

considerations. Foremost stand, as receiving this great manifestation

of Jesus Christ, the two greatest sinners of the whole band, Simon

Peter, and Thomas, which is called Didymus,' the denier and the

doubter. Singularly contrasted these two men were in much of their

disposition; and yet alike in the fact that the Crucifixion had been

too much for their faith. The one of them was impetuous, the other of

them slow. The one was always ready to say more than he meant; the

other always ready to do more than he said. The one was naturally

despondent, disposed to look ahead and to see the gloomiest side of

everything--Let us also go that we may die with Him'--the other never

looking an inch beyond his nose, and always yielding himself up to the

impulse of the moment. And yet both of them were united in this, that

the one, from a sudden wave of cowardice which swept him away from his

deepest convictions and made him for an hour untrue to his warmest

love, and the other, from giving way to his constitutional tendency to

despondency, and to taking the blackest possible view of

everything--they had both of them failed in their faith, the one

turning out a denier and the other turning out a doubter. And yet here

they are, foremost upon the list of those who saw the Risen Christ.

Well, there are two lessons there, and the one is this--let us

Christian people learn with what open hearts and hands we should

welcome a penitent when he comes back. The other is,--let us learn who

they are to whom Jesus Christ deigns to manifest Himself--not

immaculate monsters, but men that, having fallen, have learned humility

and caution, and by penitence have risen to a securer standing, and

have turned even their transgressions into steps in the ladder that

lifts them to Christ. It was something that the first to whom the risen

Saviour appeared when He came victorious and calm from the grave, was

the woman out of whom He had cast seven devils,' and the blessed truth

which that teaches is the same as that which is to be drawn from this

list of those whom He regarded, and whom we regard, as then

constituting the true nucleus of His Church--a list which is headed by

the blackest denier and the most obstinate and captious sceptic in the

whole company. There were together Simon Peter and Thomas, which is

called Didymus,' and the little group was glad to have them, and

welcomed them, as it becomes us to welcome brethren who have fallen,

and who come again saying, I repent.'

Well, then, take the next: he was Nathanael, of Cana in Galilee'; a

guileless Israelite indeed,' so swift to believe, so ready with his

confession, so childlike in his wonder, so ardent in his love and

faith. The only thing that Christ is recorded as having said to him is

this: Because I said. . . believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things

than these.' A promise of growing clearness of vision and growing

fullness of manifestation was made to this man, who never appears

anywhere else in Scripture but in these two scenes, and so may stand to

us as the type of the opposite kind of Christian experience from that

stormy one of the doubter and the denier--viz. that of persistent,

quiet, continuous growth, which is marked by faithful use of the

present amount of illumination, and is rewarded by a continual increase

of the same. If the keynote to the two former lives is, that sin

confessed helps a man to climb, the keynote to this man's is the other

truth, that they are still more blessed who, with no interruptions,

backslidings, inconsistencies, or denials, by patient continuousness in

well-doing, widen the horizon of their Christian vision and purge their

eyesight for daily larger knowledge. To these, as to the others, there

is granted the vision of the risen Lord, and to them also is entrusted

the care of His sheep and His lambs. We do not need to go away into the

depths and the darkness in order to realise the warmth and the

blessedness of the light. There is no necessity that any Christian

man's career should be broken by denials like Peter's or by doubts like

Thomas's, but we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and

Saviour.' So is the kingdom of heaven, first the blade, then the ear,

after that the full corn in the ear.'

Then, still further, there were here the two sons of Zebedee.' These

were the men of whom the Master said that they were sons of thunder,'

who, by natural disposition, in so far as they resembled one another

(which they seem to have done), were eager, energetic, somewhat

bigoted, ready with passionate rebukes, and not unwilling to invoke

destructive vengeance, all for the love of Him. They were also touched

with some human ambition which led them to desire a place at His right

hand and His left, but the ambition, too, was touched with love towards

Him, which half redeemed it. But by dwelling with Him one of them, at

least, had become of all the group the likest his Master. And the old

monastic painters taught a very deep truth when, in their pictures of

the apostles, they made John's almost a copy of the Master's face. To

him, too, there was granted in like manner a place amongst this blessed

company, and it is surely a trace of his hand that his place should

seem so humble. Any other but himself would certainly have put James

and John in their natural place beside Peter. It must have been himself

who slipped himself and his brother into so inconspicuous a position in

the list, and further veiled his personality under the patronymic, the

sons of Zebedee.'

Last of all come two other of His disciples,' not worth naming.

Probably, as I have said, they were the missing two out of the five of

the first chapter; but possibly they were only disciples' in the wider

sense, and not of the Apostolic group at all. Nobody can tell. What

does it matter? The lesson to be gathered from their presence in this

group is one that most of us may very well take to heart. There is a

place for commonplace, undistinguished people, whose names are not

worth repeating in any record; there is a place for us one-talented

folk, in Christ's Church, and we, too, have a share in the

manifestation of His love. We do not need to be brilliant, we do not

need to be clever, we do not need to be influential, we do not need to

be energetic, we do not need to be anything but quiet, waiting souls,

in order to have Christ showing Himself to us, as we toil wearily

through the darkness of the night. Undistinguished disciples have a

place in His heart, a sphere and a function in His Church, and a share

in His revelation of Himself.

III. The last point that I touch is this, that the purpose of this

group is significant.

What did they thus get together for? Simon Peter saith, I go a fishing.

They say, We also go with thee.' So they went back again to their old

trade, and they had not left the nets and the boats and the hired

servants for ever, as they once thought they had.

What sent them back? Not doubt or despair; because they had seen Jesus

Christ up in Jerusalem, and had come down to Galilee at His command on

purpose to meet Him. There shall ye see Him, lo! I have told you,' was

ringing in their ears, and they went back in full confidence of His

appearance there. It is very like Peter that he should have been the

one to suggest filling an hour of the waiting time with manual labour.

The time would be hanging heavily on his hands. John could have sat

still in the house,' like Mary, the heart all the busier, because the

hands lay quietly in the lap. But that was not Peter's way, and John

was ready to keep him company. Peter thought that the best thing they

could do, till Jesus chose to come, was to get back to their work, and

he was sensible and right. The best preparation for Christ's

appearance, and the best attitude to be found in by Him, is doing our

daily work, however secular and small it may be. A dirty, wet fishing

boat, all slimy with scales, was a strange place in which to wait for

the manifestation of a risen Saviour. But it was the right place,

righter than if they had been wandering about amongst the fancied

sanctities of the synagogues.

They went out to do their work; and to them was fulfilled the old

saying, I, being in the way, the Lord met me.' Jesus Christ will come

to you and me in the street if we carry the waiting heart there, and in

the shop, and the factory, and the counting-house, and the kitchen, and

the nursery, and the study, or wherever we may be. For all things are

sacred when done with a hallowed heart, and He chooses to make Himself

known to us amidst the dusty commonplaces of daily life.

He had said to them before the Crucifixion: When I sent you forth

without purse or scrip, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing.'

And then He said, as changing the conditions: But now he that hath a

purse or scrip, let him take it.' As long as He was with them they were

absolved from these common tasks. Now that He had left them the

obligation recurred. And the order of things for His servants in all

time coming was therein declared to be: no shirking of daily tasks on

the plea of wanting divine communications; keep at your work, and if it

last all night, stick to it; and if there are no fish in the net, never

mind; out with it again. And be sure that sooner or later you will see

Him standing on the beach, and hear His voice, and be blessed by His

smile.

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THE BEACH AND THE SEA

When the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the

disciples knew not that it was Jesus.'--JOHN xxi. 4.

The incident recorded in this appendix to John's Gospel is separated

from the other appearances of our risen Lord in respect of place, time,

and purpose. They all occurred in and about Jerusalem; this took place

in Galilee. The bulk of them happened on the day of the Resurrection,

one of them a week after. This, of course, to allow time for the

journey, must have been at a considerably later date. Their object was,

mainly, to establish the reality of the Resurrection, the identity of

Christ's physical body, and to confirm the faith of the disciples

therein. Here, these purposes retreat into the background; the object

of this incident is to reveal the permanent relations between the risen

Lord and His struggling Church.

The narrative is rich in details which might profitably occupy us, but

the whole may be gathered up in two general points of view in

considering the revelation which we have here in the participation of

Christ in His servants' work, and also the revelation which we have in

the preparation by Christ of a meal for His toiling servants. We take

this whole narrative thus regarded as our subject on this Easter

morning.

I. First we have here a revelation of the permanent relation of Jesus

Christ to His Church and to the individuals who compose it, in this,

that the risen Lord on the shore shares in the toil of His servants on

the restless sea.

The little group of whom we read in this narrative reminds us of the

other group of the first disciples in the first chapter of this Gospel.

Four out of the five persons named in our text appear there: Simon

Peter, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, James and

John. And a very natural inference is that the two others' unnamed here

are the two others of that chapter, viz. Andrew and Philip. If so, we

have at the end, the original little group gathered together again;

with the addition of the doubting Thomas.

Be that as it may, there they are on the shore of the sea, and Peter

characteristically takes the lead and suggests a course that they all

accept: I go a fishing.' We also go with thee.'

Now we must not read that as if it meant: It is all over! Our hopes are

vain! We dreamed that we were going to be princes in the Messiah's

Kingdom, we have woke up to find that we are only fishermen. Let us go

back to our nets and our boats!' No! all these men had seen the risen

Lord, and had received from His breath the gift of the Holy Spirit.

They had all gone from Jerusalem to Galilee, in obedience to His

command, and were now waiting for His promised appearance. Very noble

and beautiful is the calm patience with which they fill the time of

expectation with doing common and long-abandoned tasks. They go back to

the nets and the boats long since forsaken at the Master's bidding.

That is not like fanatics. That is not like people who would be liable

to the excesses of excitement that would lead to the hallucination,'

which is the modern explanation of the resurrection faith, on the part

of the disciples.

And it is a precious lesson for us, dear brethren! that whatever may be

our memories, and whatever may be our hopes, the very wisest thing we

can do is to stick to the common drudgery, and even to go back to

abandoned tasks. It stills the pulses. Study to be quiet; and to do our

own business' is the best remedy for all excitement, whether it be of

sorrow or of hope. And not seldom to us, if we will learn and practise

that lesson, as to these poor men in the tossing fisherman's boat, the

accustomed and daily duties will be the channel through which the

presence of the Master will be manifested to us.

So they go, and there follow the incidents which I need not repeat,

because we all know them well enough. Only I wish to mark the distinct

allusion throughout the whole narrative to the earlier story of the

first miraculous draught of fishes which was connected with their call

to the Apostleship, and was there by Christ declared to have a

symbolical meaning. The correspondences and the contrasts are obvious.

The scene is the same; the same green mountains look down upon the same

blue waters. It was the same people that were concerned. They were,

probably enough, in the same fishing-boat. In both there had been a

night of fruitless toil; in both there was the command to let down the

net once more; in both obedience was followed by instantaneous and

large success.

So much for the likenesses; the contrasts are these. In the one case

the Master is in the boat with them, in the other He is on the shore;

in the one the net is breaking; in the other, though there were so

many, yet did it not break.' In the one Peter, smitten by a sense of

his own sinfulness, says, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O

Lord!' In the other, Peter, with a deeper knowledge of his own

sinfulness, but also with the sweet knowledge of forgiveness, casts

himself into the sea, and flounders through the shallows to reach the

Lord. The one is followed by the call to higher duty and to the

abandonment of possessions; the other is followed by rest and the

mysterious meal on the shore.

That is to say, whilst both of the stories point the lesson of service

to the Master, the one of them exhibits the principles of service to

Him whilst He was still with them, and the other exhibits the

principles of service to Him when He is removed from struggling and

toiling on the billows to the calm of the peaceful shore in the morning

light.

So we may take that night of toil as full of meaning. Think of them as

the darkness fell, and the solemn bulk of the girdling hills lay

blacker upon the waters, and the Syrian sky was mirrored with all its

stars sparkling in the still lake. All the night long cast after cast

was made, and time after time the net was drawn in and nothing in it

but tangle and mud. And when the first streak of the morning breaks

pale over the Eastern hills they are still so absorbed in their tasks

that they do not recognise the voice that hails them from the nearer

shore: Lads, have ye any meat?' And they answer it with a half surly

and wholly disappointed monosyllabic No!' It is an emblem for us all;

weary and wet, tugging at the oar in the dark, and often seeming to

fail. What then? If the last cast has brought nothing, try another. Out

with the nets once more! Never mind the darkness, and the cold, and the

wetting spray, and the weariness. You cannot expect to be as

comfortable in a fishing-boat as in your drawing-room. You cannot

expect that your nets will be always full. Failure and disappointment

mingle in the most successful lives. Christian work has often to be

done with no results at all apparent to the doer, but be sure of this,

that they who learn and practise the homely, wholesome virtue of

persistent adherence to the task that God sets them, will catch some

gleams of a Presence most real and most blessed, and before they die

will know that their labour has not been in vain in the Lord.' They

that sow in tears shall reap in joy.'

And so, finally, about this first part of my subject, there stands out

before us here the blessed picture of the Lord Himself, the Risen Lord,

with the halo of death and resurrection round about Him; there, on the

firm beach, in the increasing light of the morning, interested in,

caring about, directing and crowning with His own blessing, the

obedient work of His servants.

The simple prose fact of the story, in its plain meaning, is more

precious than any spiritualising' of it. Take the fact. Jesus Christ,

fresh from the grave, who had been down into those dark regions of

mystery where the dead sleep and wait, and had come back into this

world, and was on the eve of ascending to the Father--this Christ, the

possessor of such experience, takes an interest in seven poor men's

fishing, and cares to know whether their ragged old net is full or is

empty. There never was a more sublime and wonderful binding together of

the loftiest and the lowliest than in that question in the mouth of the

Risen Lord. If men had been going to dream about what would be fitting

language for a risen Saviour, if we had to do here with a legend, and

not with a piece of plain, prosaic fact, do you think that the

imagination would ever have entered the mind of the legend-maker to put

such a question as that into such lips at such a time? Lads, have ye

any meat?'

It teaches us that anything that interests us is not without interest

to Christ. Anything that is big enough to occupy our thoughts and our

efforts is large enough to be taken into His. All our ignoble toils,

and all our petty anxieties, touch a chord that vibrates in that deep

and tender heart. Though other sympathy may be unable to come down to

the minutenesses of our little lives, and to wind itself into the

narrow room in which our histories are prisoned, Christ's sympathy can

steal into the narrowest cranny. The risen Lord is interested in our

poor fishing and our disappointments.

And not only that, here is a promise for us, a prophecy for us, of

certain guidance and direction, if only we will come to Him and

acknowledge our dependence upon Him. The question that was put to them,

Lads, have ye any meat?' was meant to evoke the answer, No!' The

consciousness of my failure is the pre-requisite to my appeal to Him to

prosper my work. And just as before He would, on the other margin of

that same shore, multiply the loaves and the fishes, He put to them the

question, How many have ye?' that they might know clearly the

inadequacy of their own resources for the hungry crowd, so here, in

order to prepare their hearts for the reception of His guidance and His

blessing, He provides that they be brought to catalogue and confess

their failures. So He does with us all, beats the self-confidence out

of us, blessed be His name! and makes us know ourselves to be empty in

order that He may pour Himself into us, and flood us with the joy of

His presence.

Then comes the guidance given. We may be sure that it is given to us

all to-day, if we wait upon Him and ask Him. Cast the net on the right

side of the ship, and ye shall find.' His command is followed by swift,

unanswering, unquestioning obedience, which in its turn is immediately

succeeded by the large blessing which the Master then gave on the

instant, which He gives still, though often, in equal love and

unquestioned wisdom, it comes long after faith has discerned His

presence and obedience has bowed to His command.

It may be that we shall not see the results of our toil till the

morning dawns and the great net is drawn to land by angel hands. But we

may be sure that while we are toiling on the tossing sea, He watches

from the shore, is interested in all our weary efforts, will guide us

if we own to Him our weakness, and will give us to see at last issues

greater than we had dared to hope from our poor service. The dying

martyr looked up and saw Him standing at the right hand of God,' in the

attitude of interested watchfulness and ready help. This Easter morning

bids us lift our eyes to a risen Lord who has not left us to serve

alone,' nor gone up on high, like some careless general to a safe

height, while his forsaken soldiers have to stand the shock of onset

without him. From this height He bends down and covers our heads in the

day of battle.' He was received up,' says the Evangelist, and sat on

the right hand of God, and they went forth and preached everywhere.'

Strange contrast between His throned rest and their wandering toils for

Him! But the contrast gives place to a deeper identity of work and

condition, as the Gospel goes on to say, The Lord also working with

them and confirming the word with signs following.'

Though we be on the tossing sea and He on the quiet shore, between us

there is a true union and communion, His heart is with us, if our

hearts be with Him, and from Him will pass over all strength, grace,

and blessing to us, if only we know His presence, and owning our

weakness, obey His command and expect His blessing.

II. Look at the other half of this incident before us. I pass over the

episode of the recognition of Jesus by John, and of Peter struggling to

His feet, interesting as it is, in order to fix upon the central

thought of the second part of the narrative, viz. the risen Lord on the

shore, in the increasing light of the morning, preparing a table' for

His toiling servants. That fire of coals' and the simple refreshment

that was being dressed upon it had been prepared there by Christ's own

hand. We are not told that there was anything miraculous about it. He

had gathered the charcoal; He had procured the fish; He had dressed it

and prepared it. They are bidden to bring of the fish they had caught';

He accepts their service, and adds the result of their toil, as it

would seem, to the provision which His own hand has prepared. He

summons them to a meal, not the midday repast, for it was still early

morning. They seat themselves, smitten by a great awe. The meal goes on

in silence. No word is spoken on either side. Their hearts know Him. He

waits on them, making Himself their Servant as well as their Host. He

taketh bread and giveth them and fish likewise,' as He had done in the

miracles by the same shore and on that sad night in the upper room that

seemed so far away now, and in the roadside inn at Emmaus, when

something in His manner or action disclosed Him to the wondering two at

the table.

Now what does all that teach us? Two things; and first--neglecting for

a moment the difference between shore and sea--here we have the fact of

Christ's providing, even by doing menial offices, for His servants.

These seven men were wet and weary, cold and hungry. The first thing

they wanted when they came out of the fishing-boat was their breakfast.

If they had been at home, their wives and children would have got it

ready for them. Jesus had a great deal to say to them that day, a great

deal to teach them, much to do for them, and for the whole world, by

the words that followed; but the first thing that He thinks about is to

feed them. And so, cherishing no overstrained contempt for material

necessities and temporal mercies, let us remember that it is His hand

that feeds us still, and let us be glad to think that this Christ,

risen from the dead and with His heart full of the large blessings that

He was going to bestow, yet paused to consider: They are coming on

shore after a night's hard toil, they will be faint and weary; let Me

feed their bodies before I begin to deal with their hearts and

spirits.'

And He will take care of you, brother! and of us all. The bread will be

given' us, at any rate, and the water made sure.' It was a modest meal

that He with His infinite resources thought enough for toiling

fishermen. One fish,' as the original shows us, one loaf of bread.' No

more! He could as easily have spread a sumptuous table for them. There

is no covenant for superfluities, necessaries will be given. Let us

bring down our wishes to His gifts and promises, and recognise the fact

that he who needs least is the nearest the gods,' and he that needs

least is surest of getting from Christ what he needs.

But then, besides that, the supply of all other deeper and loftier

necessities is here guaranteed. The symbolism of our text divides,

necessarily, the two things which in fact are not divided. It is not

all toiling on the restless sea here, any more than it is all rest and

fruition yonder; but all that your spirit needs, for wisdom, patience,

heroism, righteousness, growth, Christ will give you in your work; and

that is better than giving it to you after your work, and the very work

which is blessed by Him, and furthered and prospered by Him, the very

work itself will come to be moat and nourishment. Out of the eater will

come forth meat,' and the slain lions' of past struggles and sorrows,

the next time we come to them, will be full of honey.'

Finally, there is a great symbolical prophecy here if we emphasise the

distinction between the night and the morning, between the shore and

the sea. We can scarcely fail to catch this meaning in the incident

which sets forth the old blessed assurance that the risen Lord is

preparing a feast on the shore while His servants are toiling on the

darkling sea.

All the details, such as the solid shore in contrast with the changeful

sea, the increasing morning in contrast with the toilsome night, the

feast prepared, have been from of old consecrated to shadow forth the

differences between earth and heaven. It would be blindness not to see

here a prophecy of the glad hour when Christ shall welcome to their

stable home, amid the brightness of unsetting day, the souls that have

served Him amidst the fluctuations and storms of life, and seen Him in

its darkness, and shall satisfy all their desires with the bread of

heaven.'

Our poor work which He deigns to accept forms part of the feast which

is spread at the end of our toil, when there shall be no more sea.' He

adds the results of our toil to the feast which He has prepared. The

consequences of what we have done here on earth make no small part of

the blessedness of heaven.

Their works and alms and all their good endeavour Stayed not behind,

nor in the grave were trod.'

The souls which a Paul or a John has won for the Master, in their

vocation as fishers of men,' are their hope and joy and crown of

rejoicing, in the presence of our Lord Jesus.' The great benediction

which the Spirit bade the Apocalyptic seer write over the dead which

die in the Lord,' is anticipated in both its parts by this mysterious

meal on the beach. They rest from their labours' inasmuch as they find

the food prepared for them, and sit down to partake; Their works do

follow them' inasmuch as they bring of the fish which they have

caught.'

Finally, Christ Himself waits on them, therein fulfilling in symbol

what He has told us in great words that dimly shadow wonders

unintelligible until experienced: Verily I say unto you, He shall gird

Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth, and

serve them.'

So here is a vision to cheer us all. Life must be full of toil and of

failure. We are on the midnight sea, and have to tug, weary and wet, at

a heavy oar, and to haul an often empty net. But we do not labour

alone. He comes to us across the storm, and is with us in the night, a

most real, because unseen Presence. If we accept the guidance of His

directing word, His indwelling Spirit, and His all-sufficient example,

and seek to ascertain His will in outward Providences, we shall not be

left to waste our strength in blunders, nor shall our labour be in

vain. In the morning light we shall see Him standing serene on the

steadfast shore. The Pilot of the Galilean lake' will guide our frail

boat through the wild surf that marks the breaking of the sea of life

on the shore of eternity; and when the sun rises over the Eastern hills

we shall land on the solid beach, bringing our few small fishes' with

us, which He will accept. And there we shall rest, nor need to ask who

He is that serves us, for we shall know that It is the Lord!'

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IT IS THE LORD!'

Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the

Lord.'--JOHN xxi. 7.

It seems a very strange thing that these disciples had not, at an

earlier period of this incident, discovered the presence of Christ,

inasmuch as the whole was so manifestly a repetition of that former

event by which the commencement of their ministry had been signalised,

when He called them to become fishers of men.' We are apt to suppose

that when once again they embarked on the lake, and went back to their

old trade, it must have been with many a thought of Him busy at their

hearts. Yonder--perhaps we fancy them thinking--is the very point where

we saw Him coming out of the shadows of the mountains, that night when

He walked on the water; yonder is the little patch of grass where He

made them all sit down whilst we bore the bread to them: there is the

very spot where we were mending our nets when He came up to us and

called us to Himself; and now it is all over. We have loved and lost

Him; He has been with us, and has left us. We trusted that it had been

He who should have redeemed Israel,' and the Cross has ended it all!

So, we are apt to think, they must have spoken; but there does not seem

to have been about them any such sentimental remembrance. John takes

pains in this narrative, I think, to show them to us as plain, rough

men, busy about their night's work, and thinking a great deal more of

their want of success in fishing, than about the old associations which

we are apt to put into their minds. Then through the darkness He comes,

as they had seen Him come once before, when they know Him not; and He

speaks to them as He had spoken before, and they do not detect His

voice yet; and He repeats the old miracle, and their eyes are all

holden, excepting the eyes of him who loved, and he first says, It is

the Lord!' Now, besides all the other features of this incident by

which it becomes the revelation of the Lord's presence with His Church,

and the exhibition of the work of the Church during all the course of

the world's history, it contains valuable lessons on other points, such

as these which I shall try to bring before you.

Now and always, as in that morning twilight on the Galilean lake,

Christ comes to men. Everywhere He is present, everywhere revealing

Himself. Now, as then, our eyes are holden' by our own fault, so that

we recognise not the merciful Presence which is all around us. Now, as

then, it is they who are nearest to Christ by love who see Him first.

Now, as then, they who are nearest to Him by love, are so because He

loves them, and because they know and believe the love which He has to

them. I find, then, in this part of the story three thoughts,--First,

they only see aright who see Christ in everything. Secondly, they only

see Christ who love Him. Lastly, they only love Him who know that He

loves them,

I. First then, they only see aright who see Christ in everything.

This word of John's, It is the Lord!'--ought to be the conviction with

the light of which we go out to the examination of all events, and to

the consideration of all the circumstances of our daily life. We

believe that unto Christ is given all power in heaven and upon earth.'

We believe that to Him belongs creative power--that without Him was not

anything made which was made.' We believe that from Him came all life

at first. In Him life was, as in its deep source. He is the Fountain of

life. We believe that as no being comes into existence without His

creative power, so none continues to exist without His sustaining

energy. We believe that He allots to all men their natural characters

and their circumstances. We believe that the history of the world is

but the history of His influence, and that the centre of the whole

universe is the cross of Calvary. In the light of such convictions, I

take it, every man that calls himself a Christian ought to go out to

meet life and to study all events. Let me try, then, to put before you,

very briefly, one or two of the provinces in which we are to take this

conviction as the keynote to all our knowledge.

No man will understand the world aright, to begin with, who cannot say

about all creation, It is the Lord!' Nature is but the veil of the

invisible and ascended Lord: and if we would pierce to the deepest

foundations of all being, we cannot stop until we get down to the

living power of Christ our Saviour and the Creator of the world, by

whom all things were made, and whose will pouring out into this great

universe, is the sustaining principle and the true force which keeps it

from nothingness and from quick decay.

Why, what did Christ work all His miracles upon earth for? Not solely

to give us a testimony that the Father had sent Him; not solely to make

us listen to His words as a Teacher sent from God; not solely as proof

of His Messiahship,--but besides all these purposes there was surely

this other, that for once He would unveil to us the true Author of all

things, and the true Foundation of all being. Christ's miracles

interrupted the order of the world, because they made visible to men

for once the true and constant Orderer of the order. They interrupted

the order in so far as they struck out the intervening links by which

the creative and sustaining word of God acts in nature, and suspended

each event directly from the firm staple of His will. They revealed the

eternal Orderer of that order in that they showed the Incarnate Word

wielding the forces of nature, which He has done from of old and still

does. We are then to take all these signs and wonders that He wrought,

as a perennial revelation of the real state of things with regard to

this natural world, and to see in them all, signs and tokens that into

every corner and far-off region of the universe His loving hand

reaches, and His sustaining power goes forth. Into what province of

nature did He not go? He claimed to be the Lord of life by the side of

the boy's bier at the gate of Nain, in the chamber of the daughter of

Jairus, by the grave of Lazarus. He asserted for Himself authority over

all the powers and functions of our bodily life, when He gave eyes to

the blind, hearing to the deaf, feet to the lame. He showed that He was

Lord over the fowl of the air, the beasts of the earth, the fish of the

sea. And He asserted His dominion over inanimate nature, when the

fig-tree, cursed by Him, withered away to its roots, and the winds and

waves sunk into silence at His gentle voice. He let us get a glimpse

into the dark regions of His rule over the unseen, when with authority

He commanded the unclean spirits, and they came out.' And all these

things He did, in order that we, walking in this fair world,

encompassed by the glories of this wonderful universe, should be

delivered from the temptation of thinking that it is separated from

Him, or independent of His creative and sustaining power; and in order

that we should feel that the continuance of all which surrounds us, the

glories of heaven and the loveliness of earth, are as truly owing to

the constant intervention of His present will, and the interposition

beneath them of His sustaining hand, as when first, by the Word of God'

who was with God and who was God,' speaking forth His fiat, there came

light and beauty out of darkness and chaos.

O Christian men! we shall never understand the Christian thought about

God's universe, until we are able to say, Preservation is a continual

creation; and beneath all the ordinary workings of Nature, as we

faithlessly call it, and the apparently dead play of secondary causes,

there are welling forth, and energising, the living love and the

blessed power of Christ, the Maker, and Monarch, and Sustainer of all.

It is the Lord!' is the highest teaching of all science. The mystery of

the universe, and the meaning of God's world, are shrouded in hopeless

obscurity, until we learn to feel that all laws suppose a Lawgiver, and

that all working involves a divine energy; and that beneath all which

appears there lies for ever rising up through it and giving it its life

and power, the one true living Being, the Father in heaven, the Son by

whom He works, and the Holy Ghost the Spirit. Darkness lies on Nature,

except to those who in

the light of setting suns,

And the round ocean, and the living air,

And the blue sky,'

see that Form which these disciples saw in the morning twilight. Let It

is the Lord!' be the word on our lips as we gaze on them all, and

nature will then be indeed to us the open secret, the secret of the

Lord which He will show to them that fear Him.'

Then again, the same conviction is the only one that is adequate either

to explain or to make tolerable the circumstances of our earthly

condition. To most men--ah! to all of us in our faithless times--the

events that befall ourselves, seem to be one of two things equally

horrible, the play of a blind Chance, or the work of an iron Fate. I

know not which of these two ghastly thoughts about the circumstances of

life is the more depressing, ruining all our energy, depriving us of

all our joy, and dragging us down with its weight. But brethren, and

friends, there are but these three ways for it--either our life is the

subject of a mere chaotic chance; or else it is put into the mill of an

iron destiny, which goes grinding on and crushing with its remorseless

wheels, regardless of what it grinds up; or else, through it all, in it

all, beneath it and above it all, there is the Will which is Love, and

the Love which is Christ! Which of these thoughts is the one that

commends itself to your own hearts and consciences, and which is the

one under which you would fain live if you could? I understand not how

a man can front the awful possibilities of a future on earth, knowing

all the points at which he is vulnerable, and all the ways by which

disaster may come down upon him, and retain his sanity, unless he

believes that all is ruled, not merely by a God far above him, who may

be as unsympathising as He is omnipotent, but by his Elder Brother, the

Son of God, who showed His heart by all His dealings with us here

below, and who loves as tenderly, and sympathises as closely with us as

ever He did when on earth He gathered the weary and the sick around

Him. Is it not a thing, men and women, worth having, to have this for

the settled conviction of your hearts, that Christ is moving all the

pulses of your life, and that nothing falls out without the

intervention of His presence and the power of His will working through

it? Do you not think such a belief would nerve you for difficulty,

would lift you buoyantly over trials and depressions, and would set you

upon a vantage ground high above all the petty annoyances of life? Tell

me, is there any other place where a man can plant his foot and say,

Now I am on a rock and I care not what comes'? The riddle of Providence

is solved, and the discipline of Providence is being accomplished when

we have grasped this conviction--All events do serve me, for all

circumstances come from His will and pleasure, which is love; and

everywhere I go--be it in the darkness of disaster or in the sunshine

of prosperity--I shall see standing before me that familiar and beloved

Shape, and shall be able to say, It is the Lord!' Friends and brethren,

that is the faith to live by, that is the faith to die by; and without

it life is a mockery and a misery.

Once more this same conviction, It is the Lord! should guide us in all

our thoughts about the history and destinies of mankind and of Christ's

Church. The Cross is the centre of the world's history, the incarnation

and the crucifixion of our Lord are the pivot round which all the

events of the ages revolve. The testimony of Jesus was the spirit of

prophecy,' and the growing power of Jesus is the spirit of history, and

in every book that calls itself the history of a nation, unless there

be written, whether literally or in spirit, this for its motto, It is

the Lord!' all will be shallow and incomplete.

They that went before and they that came after,' when He entered into

the holy city in His brief moment of acceptance and pomp, surrounded

Him with hosannas and jubilant gladness. It is a deep and true symbol

of the whole history of the world. All the generations that went before

Him, though they knew it not, were preparing the way of the Lord, and

heralding the advent of Him who was the desire of all nations' and the

light of men'; and all the generations that come after, though they

know it not, are swelling the pomp of His triumph and hastening the

time of His crowning and dominion. It is the Lord!' is the secret of

all national existence. It is the secret of all the events of the

world. The tangled web of human history is only then intelligible when

that is taken as its clue, From Him are all things, and to Him are all

things.' The ocean from which the stream of history flows, and that

into which it empties itself, are one. He began it, He sustains it. The

help that is done upon earth He doeth it Himself,' and when all is

finished, it will be found that all things have indeed come from

Christ, been sustained and directed by Christ, and have tended to the

glory and exaltation of that Redeemer, who is King of kings and Lord of

lords, Maker of the worlds, and before whose throne are for ever

gathered for service, whether they know it or not, the forces of the

Gentiles, the riches of the nations, the events of history, the fates

and destinies of every man.

I need not dwell upon the way in which such a conviction as this, my

friends, living and working in our hearts, would change for us the

whole aspect of life, and make everything bright and beautiful, blessed

and calm, strengthening us for all which we might have to do, nerving

us for duty, and sustaining us against every trial, leading us on,

triumphant and glad, through regions all sparkling with tokens of His

presence and signs of His love, unto His throne at last, to lay down

our praises and our crowns before Him. Only let me leave with you this

one word of earnest entreaty, that you will lay to heart the solemn

alternative--either see Christ in everything, and be blessed; or miss

Him, and be miserable. Oh! it is a waste, weary world, unless it is

filled with signs of His presence. It is a dreary seventy years,

brother, of pilgrimage and strife, unless, as you travel along the

road, you see the marks that He who went before you has left by the

wayside for your guidance and your sustenance. If you want your days to

be true, noble, holy, happy, manly, and Godlike, believe us, it is only

when they all have flowing through them this conviction, It is the

Lord!' that they all become so.

II. Then, secondly, only they who love, see Christ.

John, the Apostle of Love, knew Him first. In religious matters, love

is the foundation of knowledge. There is no way of knowing a Person

except love. The knowledge of God and the knowledge of Christ are not

to be won by the exercise of the understanding. A man cannot argue his

way into knowing Christ. No skill in drawing inferences will avail him

there. The treasures of wisdom--earthly wisdom--are all powerless in

that region. Man's understanding and natural capacity-- let it keep

itself within its own limits and region, and it is strong and good; but

in the region of acquaintance with God and Christ, the wisdom of this

world is foolishness, and man's understanding is not the organ by which

he can know Christ. Oh no! there is a better way than that: He that

loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.' As it is, in feebler

measure, with regard to our personal acquaintance with one another,

where it is not so much the power of the understanding, or the

quickness of the perception, or the talent and genius of a man, that

make the foundation of his knowledge of his friend, as the force of his

sympathy and the depth of his affection; so--with the necessary

modification arising from the transference from earthly acquaintances

to the great Friend and Lover of our souls in heaven--so is it with

regard to our knowledge of Christ. Love will trace Him everywhere, as

dear friends can detect each other in little marks which are

meaningless to others. Love's quick eye pierces through disguises

impenetrable to a colder scrutiny. Love has in it a longing for His

presence which makes us eager and quick to mark the lightest sign that

He for whom it longs is near, as the footstep of some dear one is heard

by the sharp ear of affection long before any sound breaks the silence

to those around. Love leads to likeness to the Lord, and that likeness

makes the clearer vision of the Lord possible. Love to Him strips from

our eyes the film that self and sin, sense and custom, have drawn over

them. It is these which hide Him from us. It is because men are so

indifferent to, so forgetful of, their best Friend that they fail to

behold Him, It is the Lord!' is written large and plain on all things,

but like the great letters on a map, they are so obvious and fill so

wide a space, that they are not seen. They who love Him know Him, and

they who know Him love Him. The true eye-salve for our blinded eyes is

applied when we have turned with our hearts to Christ. The simple might

of faithful love opens them to behold a more glorious vision than the

mountain full of chariots of fire,' which once flamed before the

prophet's servant of old--even the august and ever-present form of the

Lord of life, the Lord of history, the Lord of providence. When they

who love Jesus turn to see the Voice that speaks with them,' they ever

behold the Son of Man in His glory; and where others see but the dim

beach and a mysterious stranger, it is to their lips that the glad cry

first comes, It is the Lord!'

And is it not a blessed thing, brethren! that thus this high and

glorious prerogative of recognising the marks of Christ's presence

everywhere, of going through life gladdened by the assurance of His

nearness, does not depend on what belongs to few men only, but on what

may belong to all? When we say that not many wise men after the flesh,

not many mighty, not many noble, are called'--when we say that love is

the means of knowledge--we are but in other words saying that the way

is open to all, and that no characteristics belonging to classes, no

powers that must obviously always belong to but a handful, are

necessary for the full apprehension of the power and blessedness of

Christ's Gospel. The freeness and the fullness of that divine message,

the glorious truth that it is for all men, and is offered to all, are

couched in that grand principle, Love that thou mayest know; love, and

thou art filled with the fullness of God, Not for the handful, not for

the elite of the world; not for the few, but for the many; not for the

wise, but for all; not for classes, but for humanity--for all that are

weak, and sinful, and needy, and foolish, and darkened He comes, who

only needs that the heart that looks should love, and then it shall

behold!

But if that were the whole that I have to say, I should have said but

little to the purpose. It very little avails to tell men to love. We

cannot love to order, or because we think it duty. There is but one way

of loving, and that is to see the lovely. The disciple who loved Jesus

was the disciple whom Jesus loved.' Generalise that, and it teaches us

this, that

III. They love who know that Christ loves them. His divine and eternal

mercy is the foundation of the whole. Our love, brethren, can never be

any thing else than our echo to His voice of tenderness than the

reflected light upon our hearts of the full glory of His affection. No

man loveth God except the man who has first learned that God loves him.

We love Him, because He first loved us.' And when we say, Love Christ,'

if we could not go on to say, Nay, rather let Christ's love come down

upon you'--we had said worse than nothing. The fountain that rises in

my heart can only spring up heavenward, because the water of it has

flowed down into my heart from the higher level. All love must descend

first, before it can ascend. We have, then, no Gospel to preach, if we

have only this to preach, Love, and thou art saved.' But we have a

Gospel that is worth the preaching, when we can come to men who have no

love in their hearts, and say, Brethren! listen to this--you have to

bring nothing, you are called upon to originate no affection; you have

nothing to do but simply to receive the everlasting love of God in

Christ His Son, which was without us, which began before us, which

flows forth independent of us, which is unchecked by all our sins,

which triumphs over all our transgressions, and which will make

us--loveless, selfish, hardened, sinful men--soft, and tender, and full

of divine affection, by the communication of its own self.

Oh, then, look to Christ, that you may love Him! Think, brethren, of

that full, and free, and boundless mercy which, from eternity, has been

pouring itself out in floods of grace and loving-kindness over all

creatures. Think of that everlasting love which presided at the

foundation of the earth, and has sustained it ever since. Think of that

Saviour who has died for us, and lives for us. Think of Christ, the

heart of God, and the fullness of the Father's mercy; and do not think

of yourselves at all. Do not ask yourselves, to begin with, the

question, Do I love Him or do I not? You will never love by that means.

If a man is cold, let him go to the fire and warm himself. If he is

dark, let him stand in the sunshine, and he will be light. If his heart

is all clogged and clotted with sin and selfishness, let him get under

the influence of the love of Christ, and look away from himself and his

own feelings, towards that Saviour whose love shed abroad is the sole

means of kindling ours. You have to go down deeper than your feelings,

your affections, your desires, your character. There you will find no

resting-place, no consolation, no power. Dig down to the living Rock,

Christ and His infinite love to you, and let it be the strong

foundation, built into which you and your love may become living

stones, a holy temple, partaking of the firmness and nature of that on

which it rests. They that love do so because they know that Christ

loves them; and they that love see Him everywhere; and they that see

Him everywhere are blessed for evermore. And let no man here torture

himself, or limit the fullness of this message that we preach, by

questionings whether Christ loves Him or not. Are you a man? are you

sinful? have you broken God's law? do you need a Saviour? Then put away

all these questions, and believe that Christ's personal love is

streaming out for the whole world, and that there is a share for you if

you like to take it and be blessed!

There is one last thought arising from the whole subject before us,

that may be worth mention before I close. Did you ever notice how this

whole incident might be turned, by a symbolical application, to the

hour of death, and the vision which may meet us when we come thither?

It admits of the application, and perhaps was intended to receive the

application, of such a symbolic reference. The morning is dawning, the

grey of night going away, the lake is still; and yonder, standing on

the shore, in the uncertain light, there is one dim Figure, and one

disciple catches a sight of Him, and another casts himself into the

water, and they find a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and

bread,' and Christ gathers them around His table, and they all know

that It is the Lord!' It is what the death of the Christian man, who

has gone through life recognising Christ everywhere, may well

become:--the morning breaking, and the finished work, and the Figure

standing on the quiet beach, so that the last plunge into the cold

flood that yet separates us, will not be taken with trembling

reluctance; but, drawn to Him by the love beaming out of His face, and

upheld by the power of His beckoning presence, we shall struggle

through the latest wave that parts us, and scarcely feel its chill, nor

know that we have crossed it; till falling blessed at His feet, we see,

by the nearer and clearer vision of His face, that this is indeed

heaven. And looking back upon the sea that brought us thither,' we

shall behold its waters flashing in the light of that everlasting

morning, and hear them breaking in music upon the eternal shore. And

then, brethren, when all the weary night-watchers on the stormy ocean

of life are gathered together around Him who watched with them from His

throne on the bordering mountains of eternity, where the day shines for

ever--then He will seat them at His table in His kingdom, and none will

need to ask, Who art Thou?' or Where am I?' for all shall know that It

is the Lord!' and the full, perfect, unchangeable vision of His blessed

face will be heaven!

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LOVEST THOU ME?'

Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more

than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love

Thee. He saith unto him, Feed My lambs.'--JOHN xxi. 15.

Peter had already seen the risen Lord. There had been that interview on

Easter morning, on which the seal of sacred secrecy was impressed;

when, alone, the denier poured out his heart to his Lord, and was taken

to the heart that he had wounded. Then there had been two interviews on

the two successive Sundays in which the Apostle, in common with his

brethren, had received, as one of the group, the Lord's benediction,

the Lord's gift of the Spirit, and the Lord's commission. But something

more was needed; there had been public denial, there must be public

confession. If he had slipped again into the circle of the disciples,

with no special treatment or reference to his fall, it might have

seemed a trivial fault to others, and even to himself. And so, after

that strange meal on the beach, we have this exquisitely beautiful and

deeply instructive incident of the special treatment needed by the

denier before he could be publicly reinstated in his office.

The meal seems to have passed in silence. That awe which hung over the

disciples in all their intercourse with Jesus during the forty days,

lay heavy on them, and they sat there, huddled round the fire, eating

silently the meal which Christ had provided, and no doubt gazing

silently at the silent Lord. What a tension of expectation there must

have been as to how the oppressive silence was to be broken! and how

Peter's heart must have throbbed, and the others' ears been pricked up,

when it was broken by Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?' We may

listen with pricked-up ears too. For we have here, in Christ's

treatment of the Apostle, a revelation of how He behaves to a soul

conscious of its fault; and in Peter's demeanour an illustration of how

a soul, conscious of its fault, should behave to Him.

There are three stages here: the threefold question, the threefold

answer, and the threefold charge. Let us look at these.

I. The threefold question.

The reiteration in the interrogation did not express doubt as to the

veracity of the answer, nor dissatisfaction with its terms; but it did

express, and was meant, I suppose, to suggest to Peter and to the

others, that the threefold denial needed to be obliterated by the

threefold confession; and that every black mark that had been scored

deep on the page by that denial needed to be covered over with the

gilding or bright colouring of the triple acknowledgment. And so Peter

thrice having said, I know Him not!' Jesus with a gracious violence

forced him to say thrice, Thou knowest that I love Thee.' The same

intention to compel Peter to go back upon his past comes out in two

things besides the triple form of the question. The one is the

designation by which he is addressed, Simon, son of Jonas,' which

travels back, as it were, to the time before he was a disciple, and

points a finger to his weak humanity before it had come under the

influence of Jesus Christ. Simon, son of Jonas,' was the name that he

bore in the days before his discipleship. It was the name by which

Jesus had addressed him, therefore, on that never-to-be-forgotten

turning-point of his life, when he was first brought to Him by his

brother Andrew. It was the name by which Jesus had addressed him at the

very climax of his past life when, high up, he had been able to see

far, and in answer to the Lord's question, had rung out the confession:

Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!' So the name by which

Jesus addresses him now says to him in effect: Remember thy human

weakness; remember how thou wert drawn to Me; remember the high-water

mark of thy discipleship, when I was plain before thee as the Son of

God, and remembering all these, answer Me--lovest thou Me?'

The same intention to drive Peter back to the wholesome remembrance of

a stained past is obvious in the first form of the question. Our Lord

mercifully does not persist in giving to it that form in the second and

third instances: Lovest thou Me more than these?' More than these,

what? I cannot for a moment believe that that question means something

so trivial and irrelevant as Lovest thou Me more than these nets, and

boats, and the fishing?' No; in accordance with the purpose that runs

through the whole, of compelling Peter to retrospect, it says to him,

Do you remember what you said a dozen hours before you denied Me,

"Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I"? Are you going to take

that stand again? Lovest thou Me more than these that never discredited

their boasting so shamefully?'

So, dear brethren! here we have Jesus Christ, in His treatment of this

penitent and half-restored soul, forcing a man, with merciful

compulsion, to look steadfastly and long at his past sin, and to

retrace step by step, shameful stage by shameful stage, the road by

which he had departed so far. Every foul place he is to stop and look

at, and think about. Each detail he has to bring up before his mind.

Was it not cruel of Jesus thus to take Peter by the neck, as it were,

and hold him right down, close to the foul things that he had done, and

say to him, Look! look! look ever! and answer, Lovest thou Me?' No; it

was not cruel; it was true kindness. Peter had never been so abundantly

and permanently penetrated by the sense of the sinfulness of his sin,

as after he was sure, as he had been made sure in that great interview,

that it was all forgiven. So long as a man is disturbed by the dread of

consequences, so long as he is doubtful as to his relation to the

forgiving Love, he is not in a position beneficially and sanely to

consider his evil in its moral quality only. But when the conviction

comes to a man, God is pacified towards thee for all that thou hast

done'; and when he can look at his own evil without the smallest

disturbance rising from slavish fear of issues, then lie is in a

position rightly to estimate its darkness and its depth. And there can

be no better discipline for us all than to remember our faults, and

penitently to travel back over the road of our sins, just because we

are sure that God in Christ has forgotten them. The beginning of

Christ's merciful treatment of the forgiven man is to compel him to

remember, that he may learn and be ashamed.

And then there is another point here, in this triple question. How

significant and beautiful it is that the only thing that Jesus Christ

cares to ask about is the sinner's love! We might have expected: Simon,

son of Jonas, are you sorry for what you did? Simon, son of Jonas, will

you promise never to do the like any more?' No! These things will come

if the other thing is there. Lovest thou Me?' Jesus Christ sues each of

us, not for obedience primarily, not for repentance, not for vows, not

for conduct, but for a heart; and that being given, all the rest will

follow. That is the distinguishing characteristic of Christian

morality, that Jesus seeks first for the surrender of the affections,

and believes, and is warranted in the belief, that if these are

surrendered, all else will follow; and love being given, loyalty and

service and repentance and hatred of self-will and of self-seeking will

follow in her train. All the graces of human character which Christ

seeks, and is ready to impart, are, as it were, but the pages and

ministers of the regal Love, who follow behind and swell the cortege of

her servants.

Christ asks for love. Surely that indicates the depth of His own! In

this commerce He is satisfied with nothing less, and can ask for

nothing more; and He seeks for love because He is love, and has given

love. Oh! to all hearts burdened, as all our hearts ought to be--unless

the burden has been cast off in one way--by the consciousness of our

own weakness and imperfection, surely, surely, it is a gospel that is

contained in that one question addressed to a man who had gone far

astray, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou?'

Here, again, we have Jesus Christ, in His dealing with the penitent,

willing to trust discredited professions. We think that one of the

signs of our being wise people is that experience shall have taught us

once' being bit, twice' to be shy,' and if a man has once deceived us

by flaming professions and ice-cold acts, never to trust him any more.

And we think that is worldly wisdom,' and the bitter fruit of earthly

experience,' and sharpness,' and shrewdness,' and so forth. Jesus

Christ, even whilst reminding Peter, by that more than these,' of his

utterly hollow and unreliable boasting, shows Himself ready to accept

once again the words of one whose unveracity He had proved. Charity

hopeth all things, believeth all things,' and Jesus Christ is ready to

trust us when we say, I love Thee,' even though often in the past our

professed love has been all disproved.

We have here, in this question, our Lord revealing Himself as willing

to accept the imperfect love which a disciple can offer Him. Of course,

many of you well know that there is a very remarkable play of

expression here. In the two first questions the word which our Lord

employs for love' is not the same as that which appears in Peter's two

first answers. Christ asks for one kind of love; Peter proffers

another. I do not enter upon discussion as to the distinction between

these two apparent synonyms. The kind of love which Christ asks for is

higher, nobler, less emotional, and more associated with the whole mind

and will. It is the inferior kind, the more warm, more sensuous, more

passionate and emotional, which Peter brings. And then, in the third

question, our Lord, as it were, surrenders and takes Peter's own word,

as if He had said, Be it so! You shrink from professing the higher

kind; I will take the lower; and I will educate and bring that up to

the height that I desire you to stand at.' Ah, brother! however stained

and imperfect, however disproved by denials, however tainted by earthly

associations, Jesus Christ will accept the poor stream of love, though

it be but a trickle when it ought to be a torrent, which we can bring

Him.

These are the lessons which it seems to me lie in this triple question.

I have dealt with them at the greater length, because those which

follow are largely dependent upon them. But let me turn now briefly, in

the second place, to--

II. The triple answer.

Yea, Lord! Thou knowest that I love Thee.' Is not that beautiful, that

the man who by Christ's Resurrection, as the last of the answers shows,

had been led to the loftiest conception of Christ's omniscience, and

regarded Him as knowing the hearts of all men, should, in the face of

all that Jesus Christ knew about his denial and his sin, have dared to

appeal to Christ's own knowledge? What a superb and all-conquering

confidence in Christ's depth of knowledge and forgivingness of

knowledge that answer showed! He felt that Jesus could look beneath the

surface of his sin, and see that below it there was, even in the midst

of the denial, a heart that in its depths was true. It is a tremendous

piece of confident appeal to the deeper knowledge, and therefore the

larger love and more abundant forgiveness, of the righteous Lord--Thou

knowest that I love Thee.'

Brethren! a Christian man ought to be sure of his love to Jesus Christ.

You do not study your conduct in order to infer from it your love to

others. You do not study your conduct in order to infer from it your

love to your wife, or your husband, or your parents, or your children,

or your friend. Love is not a matter of inference; it is a matter of

consciousness and intuition. And whilst self-examination is needful for

us all for many reasons, a Christian man ought to be as sure that he

loves Jesus Christ as he is sure that he loves his dearest upon earth.

It used to be the fashion long ago--this generation has not depth

enough to keep up the fashion--for Christian people to talk as if it

were a point they longed to know, whether they loved Jesus Christ or

not. There is no reason why it should be a point we long to know. You

know all about your love to one another, and you are sure about that.

Why are you not sure about your love to Jesus Christ? Oh! but,' you

say, look at my sins and failures'; and if Peter had looked only at his

sins, do you not think that his words would have stuck in his throat?

He did look, but he looked in a very different way from that of trying

to ascertain from his conduct whether he loved Jesus Christ or not.

Brethren, any sin is inconsistent with Christian love to Christ. Thank

God, we have no right to say of any sin that it is incompatible with

that love! More than that; a great, gross, flagrant, sudden fall like

Peter's is a great deal less inconsistent with love to Christ than are

the continuously unworthy, worldly, selfish, Christ-forgetting lives of

hosts of complacent professing Christians to-day. White ants will eat

up the carcase of a dead buffalo quicker than a lion will. And to have

denied Christ once, twice, thrice, in the space of an hour, and under

strong temptation, is not half so bad as to call Him Master' and Lord,'

and day by day, week in, week out, in works to deny Him. The triple

answer declares to us that in spite of a man's sins he ought to be

conscious of his love, and be ready to profess it when need is.

III. Lastly, we have here the triple commission.

I do not dwell upon it at any length, because in its original form it

applies especially to the Apostolic office. But the general principles

which underlie this threefold charge, to feed and to tend both the

sheep' and the lambs,' may be put in a form that applies to each of us,

and it is this--the best token of a Christian's love to Jesus Christ is

his service of man for Christ's sake. Lovest thou Me?' Yea! Lord.' Thou

hast said; go and do, Feed My lambs; feed My sheep.' We need the

profession of words; we need, as Peter himself enjoined at a subsequent

time, to be ready to give to every man that asketh us a reason of the

hope,' and an acknowledgment of the love, that are in us. But if you

want men to believe in your love, however Jesus Christ may know it, go

and work in the Master's vineyard. The service of man is the garb of

the love of God. He that loveth God will love his brother also.' Do not

confine that thought of service, and feeding, and tending, to what we

call evangelistic and religious work. That is one of its forms, but it

is only one of them. Everything in which Christian men can serve their

fellows is to be taken by them as their worship of their Lord, and is

taken by the world as the convincing proof of the reality of their

love.

Love to Jesus Christ is the qualification for all such service. If we

are knit to Him by true affection, which is based upon our

consciousness of our own falls and evils, and our reception of His

forgiving mercy, then we shall have the qualities that fit us, and the

impulse that drives us, to serve and help our fellows. I do not

say--God forbid!--that there is no philanthropy apart from Christian

faith, but I do say that, on the wide scale, and in the long run, they

who are knit to Jesus Christ by love will be those who render the

greatest help to all that are afflicted in mind, body, or estate'; and

that the true basis and qualification for efficient service of our

fellows is the utter surrender of our hearts to Him who is the Fountain

of love, and from whom comes all our power to live in the world, as the

images and embodiments of the love which has saved us that we might

help to save others.

Brethren! let us all ask ourselves Christ's question to the denier. Let

us look our past evils full in the face, that we may learn to hate

them, and that we may learn more the width and the sweep of the power

of His pardoning mercy. God grant that we may all be able to say, Thou

knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee!'

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YOUTH AND AGE, AND THE COMMAND FOR BOTH

Annual Sermon to the Young

. . . When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither

thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy

hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou

wouldest not. . . . And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him,

Follow Me.'--JOHN xxi. 18, 19.

The immediate reference of these words is, of course, to the martyrdom

of the Apostle Peter. Our Lord contrasts the vigorous and somewhat

self-willed youth and the mellowed old age of His servant, and shadows

forth his death, in bonds, by violence. And then He bids him,

notwithstanding this prospect of the issue of his faithfulness, Follow

Me.'

Now I venture, though with some hesitation, to give these words a

slightly different application. I see in them two pictures of youth and

of old age, and a commandment based upon both. You young people are

often exhorted to a Christian life on the ground of the possible

approach of death. I would not undervalue that motive, but I seek now

to urge the same thing upon you from a directly opposite consideration,

the probability that many of you will live to be old. All the chief

reasons for our being Christians are of the same force, whether we are

to die to-night, or to live for a century. So in my text I wish you to

note what you are now; what, if you live, you are sure to become; and

what, in the view of both stages, you will be wise to do. When thou

wast young thou girdedst thyself, and wentest whither thou wouldest.

When thou shalt be old another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither

thou wouldest not.' Therefore, Follow Me.'

I. So, then, note the picture here of what you are.

Most of you young people are but little accustomed to reflect upon

yourselves, or upon the special characteristics and prerogatives of

your time of life. But it will do you no harm to think for a minute or

two of what these characteristics are, that you may know your

blessings, and that you may shun the dangers which attach to them.

When thou wast young thou girdedst thyself.' There is a picture easily

translated, and significant of much. The act of girding implies

preparation for action, and may be widened out to express that most

blessed prerogative of youth, the cherishing of bright imaginations of

its future activity and course. The dreams of youth are often laughed

at, but if a young man or woman be faithful to them they are the

prophecies of the future, and are given in order that at the opening of

the flower nature may put forth her power; and so we may be able to

live through many a dreary hour in the future. Only, seeing that you do

live so much in rich foreshadowings and fair anticipations of the times

that are to come, take care that you do not waste that divine faculty,

the freshness of which is granted to you as a morning gift, the dew of

your youth.' See that you do not waste it in anticipations which cling

like mist to the low levels of life, but that you lift it higher and

embrace worthy objects. It is good that you should anticipate, that you

should live by hope. It is good that you should be drawn onwards by

bright visions, whether they be ever fulfilled or no. But there are

dangers in the exercise, and dreaming with some of you takes the place

of realising your dreams, and you build for yourselves fair fabrics in

imagination which you never take one step to accomplish and make real.

Be not the slaves and fools of your imaginations, but cultivate the

faculty of hoping largely; for the possibilities of human life are

elastic, and no man or woman, in their most sanguine, early

anticipations, if only these be directed to the one real good, has ever

exhausted or attained the possibilities open to every soul.

Again, girding one's self implies independent self-reliance, and that

is a gift and a stewardship given (as all gifts are stewardships) to

the young. We all fancy, in our early days, that we are going to build

towers that will reach to heaven.' Now we have come, and we will show

people how to do it! The past generations have failed, but ours is full

of brighter promise. There is something very touching, to us older men

almost tragical, in the unbounded self-confidence of the young life

that we see rushing to the front all round us. We know so well the

disillusion that is sure to come, the disappointments that will cloud

the morning sky. We would not carry one shadow from the darkened

experience of middle life into the roseate tints of the morning. The

vision splendid'

Will fade away Into the light of common day,'

soon enough. But for the present this self-reliant confidence is one of

the blessings of your early days.

Only remember, it is dangerous, too. It may become want of reverence,

which is ruinous, or presumption and rashness. Remember what a cynical

head of a college said, None of us is infallible, not even the

youngest,' and blend modesty with confidence, and yet be buoyant and

strong, and trust in the power that may make you strong. And then your

self-confidence will not be rashness.

Thou wentest whither thou wouldest.' That is another characteristic of

youth, after it has got beyond the schoolboy stage. Your own will tends

to become your guide. For one thing, at your time of life, most other

inward guides are comparatively weak. You have but little experience.

Most of you have not cultivated largely the habit of patient

reflection, and thinking twice before you act once. That comes: it

would not be good that it should be over-predominant in you. Old heads

on young shoulders' are always monstrosities, and it is all right that,

in your early days, you should largely live by impulse, if only, as

well as a will, there be a conscience at work which will do instead of

the bitter experience which comes to guide some of the older of us.

Again, yours is the age when passion is strong. I speak now especially

to young men. Restraints are removed for many of you. There are dozens

of young men listening to me now, away from their father's home,

separated from the purifying influence of sisters and of family life,

living in solitary lodgings, at liberty to spend their evenings where

they choose, and nobody be a bit the wiser. Ah, my dear young friend!

thou wentest whither thou wouldest' and thou wouldest whither thou

oughtest not to go.

There is nothing more dangerous than getting into the habit of saying,

I do as I like,' however you cover it over. Some of you say, I indulge

natural inclinations; I am young; a man must have his fling. Let me sow

my wild oats in a quiet corner, where nobody will see the crop coming

up; and when I get to be as old as you are, I will do as you do; young

men will be young men,' etc., etc. You know all that sort of talk. Take

this for a certain fact: that whoever puts the reins into the charge of

his own will when he is young, has put the reins and the whip into

hands which will drive over the precipice.

My friend! I will' is no word for you. There is a far diviner and

better one than that--I ought.' Have you learnt that? Do you yield to

that sovereign imperative, and say, I must, because I ought and,

therefore, I will'? Bow passion to reason, reason to conscience,

conscience to God--and then, be as strong in the will and as stiff in

the neck as ever you choose; but only then. So much, then, for my first

picture.

II. Now let me ask you to turn with me for a moment to the second

one--What you will certainly become if you live.

I have already explained that putting this meaning on the latter

portion of our first verse is somewhat forcing it from its original

signification. And yet it is so little of violence that the whole of

the language naturally lends itself to make a picture of the difference

between the two stages of life.

All the bright visions that dance before your youthful mind will fade

away. We begin by thinking that we are going to build temples, or

towers that shall reach to heaven,' and when we get into middle life we

have to say to ourselves: Well! I have scarcely material enough to

carry out the large design that I had. I think that I will content

myself with building a little hovel, that I may live in, and perhaps it

will keep the weather off me.' Hopes diminish; dreams vanish; limited

realities take their place, and we are willing to hold out our hands

and let some one else take the responsibilities that we were so eager

to lay upon ourselves at the first. Strength will fade away. Even the

youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail.'

Physical weariness, weakness, the longing for rest, the consciousness

of ever-narrowed and narrowing powers, will come to you, and if you

grow up to be old men, which it is probable that many of you will do,

you will have to sit and watch the tide of your life ebb, ebb, ebbing

away moment by moment.

Self-will will be wonderfully broken, for there are far stronger forces

that determine a man's life than his own wishes and will. We are like

swimmers in the surf of the Indian Ocean, powerless against the

battering of the wave which pitches us, for all our science, and for

all our muscle, where it will. Call it environment, call it fate, call

it circumstances, call it providence, call it God--there is something

outside of us bigger than we are, and the man who begins life, thinking

Thus I will, thus I command, let my determination stand instead of all

other reason'; has to say at last, I could not do what I wanted. I had

to be content to do what I could.' Thus our self-will gets largely

broken down; and patient acceptance of the inevitable comes to be the

wisdom and peace of the old man.

And, last of all, the picture shows us an irresistible approximation to

an unwelcome goal: Another shall carry thee whither thou wouldest not.'

Life to the old seems to you to be so empty and ashen grey that you

wonder they care to live. But life to them, for all its

disappointments, its weariness, its foiled efforts, its vanished hopes,

its departed companions, is yet life, and most of them cling to it like

a miser to his gold. But yet, like a man sucked into Niagara above the

falls, they are borne on the irresistible, smooth flood, nearer and

nearer to the edge of the rock, and they hear the mighty sound in their

ears long before they reach the place where the plunge is to be taken

from sunshine into darkness and foam.

So when thou shalt be old' your fancy will be gone, your physical

strength will be gone, your freshness will be gone, your faculty of

hoping will work feebly and have little to work on; on earth your sense

of power will be humbled, and yet you will not want to be borne to the

place whither you must be borne.

Fancy two portraits, one of a little chubby boy in child's dress, with

a round face and clustering curls and smooth cheeks and red lips, and

another of an old man, with wearied eyes, and thin locks, and wrinkled

cheeks, and a bowed frame. The difference between the two is but the

symbol of the profounder differences that separate the two selves,

which yet are the one self--the impetuous, self-reliant, self-willed,

hopeful, buoyant youth, and the weary, feeble, broken, old man. And

that is what you will come to, if you live, as sure as I am speaking to

you, and you are listening to me.

III. And now, lastly, what in the view of both these stages it is wise

for you to do.

When He had spoken thus, He saith unto him, Follow Me.' What do we mean

by following Christ? We mean submission to His authority. Follow Me' as

Captain, Commander, absolute Lawgiver, and Lord. We mean imitation of

His example. These two words include all human duty, and promise to

every man perfection if he obeys. Follow Me'--it is enough, more than

enough, to make a man complete and blessed. We mean choosing and

keeping close to Him, as Companion as well as Leader and Lord. No man

or woman will ever be solitary, though friends may go, and associates

may change, and companions may leave them, and life may become empty

and dreary as far as human sympathy is concerned--no man or woman will

ever be solitary if stepping in Christ's footsteps, close at His heels,

and realising His presence.

But you cannot follow Him, and He has no right to tell you to follow

Him, unless He is something more and other to you than Example, and

Commander, and Companion. What business has Jesus Christ to demand that

a man should go after Him to the death? Only this business, that He has

gone to the death for the man. You must follow Christ first, my friend,

by coming to Him as a sinful creature, and finding your whole salvation

and all your hope in humble reliance on the merit of His death. Then

you may follow Him in obedience, and imitation, and glad communion.

That being understood, I would press upon you this thought, that such a

following of Jesus Christ will preserve for you all that is blessed in

the characteristics of your youth, and will prevent them from becoming

evil. He will give you a basis for your hopes and fulfil your most

sanguine dreams, if these are based on His promises, and their

realisation sought in the path of His feet. As Isaiah prophesies, the

mirage shall become a pool.' That which else is an illusion, dancing

ahead and deceiving thirsty travellers into the belief that sand is

water, shall become to you really pools of water,' if your hopes are

fixed on Jesus Christ. If you follow Him, your strength will not ebb

away with shrunken sinews and enfeebled muscles. If you trust Christ,

your self-will will be elevated by submission, and become strong to

control your rebellious nature, because it is humble to submit to His

supreme command. And if you trust and follow Jesus Christ, your hope

will be buoyant, and bright, and blessed, and prolong its buoyancy, and

brightness, and blessedness into old age, when others fade.' If you

will follow Christ your old age will, if you reach it, be saved from

the bitterest pangs that afflict the aged, and will be brightened by

future possibilities. There will be no need for lingering laments over

past blessings, no need for shrinking reluctance to take the inevitable

step. An old age of peaceful, serene brightness caught from the nearer

gleam of the approaching heaven, and quiet as the evenings in the late

autumn, not without a touch of frost, perhaps, but yet kindly and

fruitful, may be ours. And instead of shrinking from the end, if we

follow Jesus, we shall put our hands quietly and trustfully into His,

as a little child does into its mother's soft, warm palm, and shall not

ask whither He leads, assured that since it is He who leads we shall be

led aright.

Dear young friends! Follow Me!' is Christ's merciful invitation to you.

You will never again be so likely to obey it as you are now. Well begun

is half ended. I would have you innocent of much transgression.' You

need Him to keep you in the slippery ways of youth. You could not go

into some of those haunts, where some of you have been, if you thought

to yourselves, Am I following Jesus as I cross this wicked threshold?'

You may never have another message of mercy brought to your ears. If

you do become a religious man in later life, you will be laying up for

yourselves seeds of remorse and sorrow, and in some cases memories of

pollution and filth, that will trouble you all your days. To-day, if ye

will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

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THEY ALSO SERVE WHO ONLY STAND AND WAIT'

Peter, seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do!

Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that

to thee? Follow thou Me.'--JOHN xxi. 21, 22.

We have seen in a former sermon that the charge of the risen Christ to

Peter, which immediately precedes these verses, allotted to him service

and suffering. The closing words of that charge Follow Me!' had a deep

significance, as uniting both parts of his task in the one supreme

command of imitation of his Master.

But the same words had also a simpler meaning, as inviting the Apostle

to come apart with Christ at the moment, for some further token of His

love or indication of His will. Peter follows; but in following,

naturally turns to see what the little group, sitting silent there by

the coal fire on the beach, may be doing, and he notices John coming

towards them, with intent to join them.

What emboldened John to thrust himself, uncalled for, into so secret an

interview? The words in which he is described in the context answer the

question. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved, which also leaned on

His breast at Supper, and said, Lord! which is he that betrayeth Thee?'

He was also bound by close ties to Peter. So with the familiarity of

perfect love which casteth out fear,' he felt that the Master could

have no secrets from him, and no charge to give to his friend which he

might not share.

Peter's swift question, Lord! and what shall this man do?' though it

has been often blamed, does not seem very blameworthy. There was

perhaps a little touch of his old vivacity in it, indicating that he

had not been sufficiently subdued and sobered by the prospect which

Christ had held out to him; but far more than that there was a natural

interest in his friend's fate, and something of a wish to have his

company on the path which he was to tread. Christ's answer, If I will

that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me!'

gently rebukes any leaven of evil that there may have been in the

question; warns him against trying to force other people into his

groove; with solemn emphasis reiterates his own duty; and, in effect,

bids him let his brother alone, and see that he himself discharges the

ministry which he has received of the Lord.

The enigmatical words of Christ, and the long life of the Apostle,

which seemed to explain them, naturally bred an interpretation of them

in the Early Church which is recorded here, as I believe, by the

Evangelist himself, to the effect that John, like another Enoch at the

beginning of a new world, was to escape the common lot. And very

beautiful is the quiet way in which the Evangelist put that error on

one side, by the simple repetition of his Master's words, emphasising

their hypothetical form and their enigmatical character: Jesus said not

unto him, He shall not die; but if I will that he tarry till I come,

what is that to thee?'

Now all this, I think, is full of lessons. Let me try to draw one or

two of them briefly now.

I. First, then, we have in that majestic If I will!' the revelation of

the risen Christ as the Lord of life and death.

In His charge to Peter, Christ had asserted His right absolutely to

control His servant's conduct and fix his place in the world, and His

power to foresee and forecast his destiny and his end. But in these

words He goes a step further. I will that he tarry'; to communicate

life and to sustain life is a divine prerogative; to act by the bare

utterance of His will upon physical nature is a divine prerogative.

Jesus Christ here claims that His will goes out with sovereign power

amongst the perplexities of human history and into the depths of that

mystery of life; and that He, the Son of Man, quickens whom He will,'

and has power to kill and to make alive.' The words would be absurd, if

not something worse, upon any but divine lips, that opened with

conscious authority, and whose Utterer knew that His hand was laid upon

the innermost springs of being.

So, in this entirely incidental fashion, you have one of the strongest

and plainest instances of the quiet, unostentatious and habitual manner

in which Jesus Christ claimed for Himself properly divine prerogatives.

Remember that He who thus spoke was standing before these seven men

there, in the morning light, on the beach, fresh from the grave. His

resurrection had proved Him to be the Lord of death. He had bound it to

His chariot-wheels as a Conqueror. He had risen and He stood there

before them with no more mark of the corruption of the grave upon Him

than there are traces of the foul water in which a sea bird may have

floated, on its white wing that flashes in the sunshine as it soars.

And surely as these men looked to Christ, declared to be the Son of God

with power, by His resurrection from the dead, they may have begun,

however foolish and slow of heart' they were to believe,' to understand

that to this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that He might

be the Lord both of the dead and of the living,' both of death and of

life.

These two Apostles' later history was full of proofs that Christ's

claim was valid. Peter is shut up in prison and delivered once, at the

very last moment, when hope was almost dead, in order that he might

understand that when he was put into another prison and not delivered,

the blow of martyrdom fell upon him, not because of the strength of his

persecutors, but because of the will of his Lord. And John had to see

his brother James, to whom he had been so closely knit, with whom he

had pledged himself to drink the cup that Christ drank of, whom he had

desired to have associated with himself in the special honours in the

Messianic Kingdom--he had to see him slain, first of the Apostles,

while he himself lingered here long after all his early associates were

gone. He had, no doubt, many a longing to depart. Solitary, surrounded

by a new world, pressed by many cares, he must often have felt that the

cross which he had to carry was no lighter than that laid on those who

had passed to their rest by martyrdom. To him it would often be

martyrdom to live. His personal longing is heard for a moment in the

last words of the Apocalypse, Amen! even so, come, Lord Jesus!'--but

undoubtedly for the most part he stayed his heart on his Lord's will,

and waited in meek patience till he heard the welcome announcement, The

Master is come and calleth for thee.'

And, dear friends! that same belief that the risen Christ is the Lord

of life and death, is the only one that can stay our hearts, or make us

bow with submission to His divine will. He who has conquered death by

undergoing it is death's Lord as well as ours, and when He wills to

bring His friends home to Himself, saith to that black-robed servant,

Go, and he goeth; do this and he doeth it.' The vision which John saw

long after this on another shore, washed by a stormier sea, spoke the

same truth as does this majestic I will'--He that liveth and became

dead and is alive for evermore,' is by virtue of His divine eternal

life, and has become in His humanity by virtue of His death and

resurrection the Lord of life and death. The hands that were nailed to

the Cross turn the keys of death and Hades. He openeth and no man

shutteth; He shutteth and no man openeth.'

II. We have here before us, in this incident, the service of patient

waiting.

If I will that he tarry, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me.' Peter

is the man of action, not great at reflection; full of impulse,

restless until his hands can do something to express his thoughts and

his emotions. On the very Mount of Transfiguration he wanted to set to

work and build three tabernacles,' instead of listening awed to the

divine colloquy. In Galilee he cannot wait quietly for his Master to

come, but must propose to his friends to go a fishing.' In the

fishing-boat, as soon as he sees the Lord he must struggle through the

sea to get at Him; whilst John sits quiet in the boat, blessed in the

consciousness of his Master's presence and in silently gazing at Him

verily there. All through the first part of the Acts of the Apostles

his bold energy goes flashing and flaming. It is always his voice that

rings out in the front, whether preaching on the Pentecost Day,

bringing healing to the sick, or fronting the Sanhedrim. His element is

in the shock of conflict and the strain of work.

John, on the other hand, seldom appears in the narrative. When he does

so he stands a silent figure by the side of Peter, and disappears from

it altogether before very long. We do not hear that he did anything. He

seems to have had no part in the missionary work of the Church.

He tarried,' that was all. The word is the same--abide'--which is so

often upon his lips in his Gospel and in his Epistles, as expressive of

the innermost experience of the Christian soul, the condition of all

fruitfulness, blessedness, knowledge and Christ-likeness. Christ's

charge to John to tarry' did not only, as his brethren misinterpreted

it, mean that his life was to be continued, but it prescribed the

manner of his life. It was to be patient contemplation, a dwelling in

the house of the Lord,' a keeping of his heart still, like some little

tarn up amongst the silent hills, for heaven with all its blue to

mirror itself in.

And that quiet life of contemplation bore its fruit. In his meditation

the deeds and words of his Master slowly grew ever more and more

luminous to him. Deeper meanings came out, revealing new

constellations, as he gazed into that opening heaven of memory. He

reaped the harvest of a quiet eye' and garnered the sheaves of it in

his Gospel, the holy of holies of the New Testament; and in his

Epistles, in which he proclaims the first and last word of revelation,

God is love'--the pure diamond that hangs at the end of the golden

chain let down from Heaven. Often, no doubt, his brethren thought him

but an idler in the land,' but at last his tarrying' was vindicated.

Now, dear brethren! in all times of the world's history that form of

Christian service needs to be pressed upon busy people. And there never

was a time in the world's history, or in the Church's history, when it

more needed to be pressed upon the ordinary Christian man than at this

day. The good and the bad of our present Christianity, and of our

present social life, conspire to make people think that those who are

not at work in some external form of Christian service for the good of

their fellows are necessarily idlers. Many of them are so, but by no

means all, and there is always the danger that the external work which

good, earnest people do shall become greater than can be wholesomely

and safely done by them without their constant recourse to this

solitary meditation, and to tarrying before God.

The stress and bustle of our everyday life; the feverish desire for

immediate results; the awakened conviction that Christianity is nothing

if not practical; the new sense of responsibility for the condition of

our fellows; the large increase of all sorts of domestic, evangelistic,

and missionary work among all churches in this day--things to be

profoundly thankful for, like all other good things have their possible

dangers; and it is laid on my heart to warn you of these now. For the

sake of our own personal hold on Jesus Christ, for the sake of our

progress in the knowledge of His truth, and for the sake of the very

work which some of us count so precious, there is need that we shall

betake ourselves to that still communion. The stream that is to water

half a continent must rise high in the lonely hills, and be fed by many

a mountain rill in the solitude, and the men who are to keep the

freshness of their Christian zeal, and of the consecration which they

will ever feel is being worn away by the attrition even of faithful

service, can only renew and refresh it by resorting again to the

Master, and imitating Him who prepared Himself for a day of teaching in

the Temple by a night of communion on the Mount of Olives.

Further, there is here a lesson of tolerance for us all. Practical men

are always disposed, as I said, to force everybody else into their

groove. Martha is always disposed to think that Mary is idle when she

is sitting at Christ's feet,' and wants to have her come into the

kitchen and help her there. The eye which sees must not say to the hand

which toils, nor the hand to the eye, I have no need of thee.' There

are men who cannot think much; there are men who cannot work much.

There are men whom God has chosen for diligent external service; there

are men whom God has chosen for solitary retired musing; and we cannot

dispense with either the one or the other. Did not John Bunyan do more

for the world when he was shut up in Bedford Gaol and dreamed his dream

than by all his tramping about Bedfordshire, preaching to a handful of

cottagers? And has not the Christian literature of the prison, which

includes three at least of Paul's Epistles, proved of the greatest

service and most precious value to the Church?

We need all to listen to the voice which says, Come ye apart by

yourselves into a solitary place, and rest awhile.' Work is good, but

the foundation of work is better. Activity is good, but the life which

is the basis of activity is even more. There is plenty of so-called

Christian work to-day which I fear me is not life but mechanism; has

slipped off its original foundations, and is, therefore, powerless. Let

us tolerate the forms of service least like our own, not seek to force

other men into our paths nor seek to imitate them. Let Peter flame in

the van, and beard high priests, and stir and fight; and let John sit

in his quiet horns, caring for his Lord's mother, and holding

fellowship with his Lord's Spirit.

III. Lastly, we have here the lesson of patient acquiescence in

Christ's undisclosed will.

The error into which the brethren of the Apostle fell as to the meaning

of the Lord's words was a very natural one, especially when taken with

the commentary which John's unusually protracted life seemed to append

to it. We know that that belief lingered long after the death of the

Apostle; and that legends, like the stories that are found in many

nations of heroes that have disappeared, but are sleeping in some

mountain recess, clustered round John's grave; over which the earth was

for many a century believed to heave and fall with his gentle

breathing.

John did not know exactly what his Master meant. He would not venture

upon a counter-interpretation. Perhaps his brethren were right, he does

not know; perhaps they were wrong, he does not know. One thing he is

quite sure of, that what his Master said was: If I will that he tarry.'

And he acquiesces quietly in the certainty that it shall be as his

Master wills; and, in the uncertainty what that will is, he says in

effect: I do not know, and it does not much matter. If I am to go to

find Him, well! If He is to come to find me, well again! Whichever way

it be, I know that the patient tarrying here will lead to a closer

communion hereafter, and so I leave it all in His hands.'

Dear brethren! that is a blessed state that you and I may come to; a

state of quiet submission, not of indifference but of acquiescence in

the undisclosed will of our loving Christ about all matters, and about

this alternative of life or death amongst the rest. The soul that has

had communion with Jesus Christ amidst the imperfections here will be

able to refer all the mysteries and problems of its future to Him with

unshaken confidence. For union with Him carries with it the assurance

of its own perpetuity, and in its sweetness yieldeth proof that it was

born for immortality.' The Psalmist learned to say, Thou shalt

afterward receive me to glory,' because he could say, I am continually

with Thee.' And in like manner we may all rise from the experience of

the present to confidence in that immortal future. Death with his

abhorred shears' cuts other close ties, but their edge turns on the

knot that binds the soul to its Saviour. He who has felt the power of

communion with the ever-living Christ cannot but feel that such union

must be for ever, and that because Christ lives, and as long as Christ

lives, he will live also.

Therefore, to the soul thus abiding in Christ that alternative of life

or death which looms so large to us when we have not Christ with us,

will dwindle down into very small dimensions. If I live there will be

work for me to do here, and His love to possess; if I die there will be

work for me to do there too, and His love to possess in still more

abundant measure. So it will not be difficult for such a soul to leave

the decision of this as of all other things with the Lord of life and

death, and to lie acquiescent in His gracious hands. That calm

acceptance of His will and patience with Christ's If' is the reward of

tarrying in silent communion with Him.

My dear friend! has death to you dwindled to a very little thing? Can

you say that you are quite sure that it will not touch your truest

self? Are you able to leave the alternative in His hands, content with

His decision and content with the uncertainty that wraps His decision?

Can you say,

Lord! It belongs not to my care,

Whether I die or live'?

The answer to these questions is involved in the answer to the

other:--Have you trusted your sinful soul for salvation to Jesus

Christ, and are you drawing from Him a life which bears fruit in glad

service and in patient communion? Then it will not much matter whether

you are in heaven or on earth, for in both places and states the

essence of your life will be the same, your Companion one, and your

work identical. If it be Christ' for me to live it will be gain' for me

to die.

END OF VOL. III.

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72. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxi-p13.3

73. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxi-p2.2

74. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxi-p9.3

75. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxi-p9.5

76. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxi-p14.1

77. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p21.1

78. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxii-p1.1

79. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxi-p9.2

80. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxi-p19.1

81. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxi-p2.3

82. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p22.1

83. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxiii-p1.1

84. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxiii-p4.1

85. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p23.1

86. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxiii-p6.1

87. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxiv-p1.1

88. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxi-p12.3

89. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxiii-p7.1

90. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p24.1

91. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxiii-p7.1

92. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxv-p1.1

93. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p25.1

94. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxvi-p1.1

95. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxvii-p2.3

96. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxvii-p2.1

97. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxvii-p2.2

98. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p26.1

99. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxvii-p1.1

100. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxvii-p5.1

101. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p27.1

102. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxviii-p1.1

103. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxix-p3.1

104. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p28.1

105. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxix-p1.1

106. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxix-p6.1

107. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxix-p10.1

108. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p29.1

109. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxx-p1.1

110. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p30.1

111. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxi-p1.1

112. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p31.1

113. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxii-p1.1

114. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxx-p11.1

115. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p32.1

116. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxiii-p1.1

117. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p33.1

118. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxiv-p1.1

119. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p34.1

120. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxv-p1.1

121. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p34.1

122. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxv-p1.1

123. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p35.1

124. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxvi-p1.1

125. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p36.1

126. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxvii-p1.1

127. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p37.1

128. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxviii-p1.1

129. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxix-p1.1

130. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxvii-p17.2

131. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p38.1

132. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p39.1

133. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xl-p1.1

134. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p39.1

135. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xl-p1.1

136. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p40.1

137. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xli-p1.1

138. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p41.1

139. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xlii-p1.1

140. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p42.1

141. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xliii-p1.1

142. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p43.1

143. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xliv-p1.1

144. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p44.1

145. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xlv-p2.1

146. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p44.1

147. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xlv-p2.1

148. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p45.1

149. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xlvi-p1.1

150. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p45.1

151. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xlvi-p1.1

152. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxvii-p12.1

153. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.i-p32.2

154. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxiii-p2.1

155. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.ii-p0.1

156. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.iii-p0.1

157. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.iv-p0.1

158. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.v-p0.1

159. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.v-p0.1

160. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.vi-p0.1

161. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.vii-p0.1

162. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.viii-p0.1

163. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.ix-p0.1

164. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.ix-p0.1

165. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.x-p0.1

166. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xi-p0.1

167. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xi-p0.1

168. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xii-p0.1

169. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xiii-p0.1

170. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xiv-p0.1

171. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xv-p0.1

172. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xvi-p0.1

173. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xvi-p0.1

174. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xvii-p0.1

175. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xviii-p0.1

176. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xix-p0.1

177. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xx-p0.1

178. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxi-p0.1

179. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxii-p0.1

180. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxiii-p0.1

181. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxiv-p0.1

182. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxv-p0.1

183. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxvi-p0.1

184. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxvii-p0.1

185. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxviii-p0.1

186. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxix-p0.1

187. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxx-p0.1

188. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxi-p0.1

189. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxii-p0.1

190. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxiii-p0.1

191. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxiv-p0.1

192. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxv-p0.1

193. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxv-p0.1

194. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxvi-p0.1

195. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxvii-p0.1

196. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxviii-p0.1

197. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xxxix-p0.1

198. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xl-p0.1

199. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xl-p0.1

200. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xli-p0.1

201. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xlii-p0.1

202. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xliii-p0.1

203. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xliv-p0.1

204. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xlv-p0.1

205. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xlv-p0.1

206. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xlvi-p0.1

207. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/john2/cache/john2.html3#ii.xlvi-p0.1