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THE RULER OF THE WAVES

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

“And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake Him, and say unto Him, Master, carest Thou not that we perish? And He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And He said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?”—Mark 4:37-40

IT would be well if professing Christians in modern days studied the four *Gospels* more than they do. No doubt all Scripture is profitable. It is not wise to exalt one part of the Bible at the expense of another. But I think it should be good for some who are very familiar with the *Epistles*, if they knew a little more about *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, and *John*.

Now why do I say this? I say it because I want professing Christians to know more about Christ. It is well to be acquainted with all the doctrines and principles of Christianity. It is better to be acquainted with Christ Himself. It is well to be familiar with faith, and grace, and justification, and sanctification. They are all matters “pertaining to the King.” But it is far better to be familiar with Jesus Himself, to see the King’s own face, and to behold His beauty. This is one secret of eminent holiness. He that would be conformed to Christ’s image, and become a Christ-like man, must be constantly studying Christ Himself.

Now the *Gospels* were written to make us acquainted with Christ. The Holy Ghost has told us the story of His life and death—His sayings and His doings, four times over. Four different, inspired hands have drawn the picture of the Saviour. His ways, His manners, His feelings, His wisdom, His grace, His patience, His love, His power, are graciously unfolded to us by four different witnesses. Ought not the sheep to be familiar with the Shepherd? Ought not the patient to be familiar with the Physician? Ought not the bride to be familiar with the Bridegroom? Ought not the sinner to be familiar with the Saviour? Beyond doubt it ought to be so. The *Gospels* were written to make men familiar with Christ, and therefore I wish men to study the *Gospels*.

On whom must we build our souls if we would be accepted with God? We must build on the *Rock*, Christ. From whom must we draw that grace of the Spirit which we daily need in order to be fruitful? We must draw from the *Vine*, Christ. To whom must we look for sympathy when earthly friends fail us or die? We must look to our *elder Brother*, Christ. By whom must our prayers be presented, if they are to be heard on high? They must be presented by our *Advocate*, Christ. With whom do we hope to spend the thousand years of glory, and the after eternity? With the *King of kings*, Christ. Surely we cannot know this Christ too well! Surely there is not a word, nor a deed, nor a day, nor a step, nor a thought in the record of His life, which ought not to be precious to us. We should labour to be familiar with every line that is written about Jesus.

Come now, and let us study a page in our Master’s history. Let us consider what we may learn from the verses of Scripture which stand at the head of this paper. You there see Jesus crossing the lake of Galilee, in a boat with His disciples. You see a sudden storm arise while He is asleep. The waves beat into the boat and fill it. Death seems to be close at hand. The frightened disciples awake their Master and cry for help. He arises and rebukes the wind and the waves, and at once there is a calm. He mildly reproves the faithless fears of His companions, and all is over. Such is the picture. It is one full of deep instruction. Come now, and let us examine what we are meant to learn.

I. Following Christ Will Not Prevent Earthly Sorrows

Let us learn, first of all, that following Christ will not prevent our having earthly sorrows and troubles.

Here are the chosen disciples of the Lord Jesus in great anxiety. The faithful little flock which believed, when priests, scribes, and Pharisees were all alike unbelieving, is allowed by the Shepherd to be much disquieted. The fear of death breaks in upon them like an armed man. The deep water seems likely to go over their souls. Peter, James, and John, the pillars of the Church about to be planted in the world, are much distressed.

Perhaps they had not reckoned on all this. Perhaps they had expected that Christ's service would at any rate lift them above the reach of earthly trials. Perhaps they thought that He who could raise the dead, and heal the sick, and feed multitudes with a few loaves, and cast out devils with a word—He would never allow His servants to be sufferers upon earth. Perhaps they had supposed He would always grant them smooth journeys, fine weather, an easy course, and freedom from trouble and care.

If the disciples thought so, they were much mistaken. The Lord Jesus taught them that a man may be one of His chosen servants, and yet have to go through many an anxiety, and endure many a pain.

It is good to understand this clearly. It is good to understand that Christ's service never did secure a man from all the ills that flesh is heir to, and never will. If you are a believer, you must reckon on having your share of sickness and pain, of sorrow and tears, of losses and crosses, of deaths and bereavements, of partings and separations, of vexations and disappointments, so long as you are in the body. Christ never undertakes that you shall get to heaven without these. He has undertaken that all who come to Him shall have all things pertaining to life and godliness; but He has never undertaken that He will make them prosperous, or rich, or healthy, and that death and sorrow shall never come to their family.

I have the privilege of being one of Christ's ambassadors. In His name I can offer eternal life to any man, woman, or child who is willing to have it. In His name I do offer pardon, peace, grace, and glory, to any son or daughter of Adam who reads this paper. But I dare not offer that person worldly prosperity as a part and parcel of the Gospel. I dare not offer him long life, an increased income, and freedom from pain. I dare not promise the man who takes up the cross and follows Christ, that in the following he shall never meet with a storm.

I know well that many do not like these terms. They would prefer having Christ and good health, Christ and plenty of money, Christ and no deaths in their family, Christ and no wearing cares, and Christ and a perpetual morning without clouds. But they do not like Christ and the cross, Christ and tribulation, Christ and the conflict, Christ and the howling wind, Christ and the storm.

Is this the secret thought of anyone who is reading this paper? Believe me, if it is, you are very wrong. Listen to me, and I will try to show you that you have yet much to learn.

How should you know who are true Christians, if following Christ was the way to be free from trouble? How should we discern the wheat from the chaff, if it were not for the winnowing of trial? How should we know whether men served Christ *for His own sake or from selfish motives*, if His service brought health and wealth with it as a matter of course? The winds of winter soon show us which of the trees are evergreen and which are not. The storms of affliction and care are useful in the same way. They discover whose faith is real, and whose is nothing but profession and form.

How would the great work of sanctification go on in a man if he had no trial? Trouble is often the only fire which will burn away the dross that clings to our hearts. Trouble is the pruning knife which the great Husbandman employs in order to make us fruitful in good works. The harvest of the Lord's field is seldom ripened by sunshine only. It must go through its days of wind, and rain, and storm.

If you desire to serve Christ and be saved, I entreat you to take the Lord on His own terms. Make up your mind to meet with your share of crosses and sorrows, and then you will not be surprised. For want of understanding this, many seem to run well for a season, and then turn back in disgust, and are cast away.

If you profess to be a child of God, leave to the Lord Jesus to sanctify you in His own way. Rest satisfied that He never makes any mistakes. Be sure that He does all things well. The winds may howl around you, and the waters swell. But fear not, "He is leading you by the right way, that He may bring you to a city of habitation" (Psa 107:7).

II. The Lord Jesus Christ Is Truly Man

Let us learn, in the second place, that the *Lord Jesus Christ is truly and really Man*.

There are words used in this little history which, like many other passages in this Gospel, bring out this truth in a very striking way. We are told that when the waves began to break on the ship, Jesus was in the hinder part, "asleep on a pillow." He was weary; and who can wonder at it, after reading the account given in the fourth chapter of *Mark*? After labouring all day to do good to souls and after preaching in the open air to vast multitudes, Jesus was fatigued. Surely if the sleep of the labouring man is sweet, much more sweet must have been the sleep of our blessed Lord!

Let us settle in our minds this great truth, that Jesus Christ was verily and indeed Man. He was equal to the Father in all things, and the eternal God. But He was also Man, and took part of flesh and blood, and was made like unto us in all things—sin only excepted. He had a body like our own. Like us, He was born of a woman. Like us, He grew and increased in stature. Like us, He was often hungry and thirsty, and faint and weary. Like us, He ate and drank, rested and slept. Like us, He sorrowed, and wept, and felt. It is all very incredible, but so it is. He that made the heavens went to and fro as a poor, weary Man on earth! He that ruled over principalities and powers in heavenly places, took on Him a frail body like our own. He that might have dwelt forever in the glory which He had with the Father, amidst the praises of legions of angels, came

down to earth and dwelt as a Man among sinful men. Surely this fact alone is an amazing miracle of condescension, grace, pity, and love.

I find a deep mine of comfort in this thought, that Jesus is perfect Man no less than perfect God. He in whom I am told by Scripture to trust is not only a great High Priest, but a feeling High Priest. He is not only a powerful Saviour, but a sympathizing Saviour. He is not only the Son of God, mighty to save—but also the Son of man, able to feel.

Who does not know that sympathy is one of the sweetest things to us in this sinful world? It is one of the bright seasons in our dark journey here below, when we can find a person who enters into our troubles, and goes along with us in our anxieties—who can weep when we weep, and rejoice when we rejoice.

Sympathy is far better than money, and far rarer too. Thousands can give who know not what it is to feel. Sympathy has the greatest power to draw us and to open our hearts. Proper and correct counsel often falls dead and useless on a heavy heart. Cold advice often makes us shut up, shrink, and withdraw into ourselves, when tendered in the day of trouble. But genuine sympathy in such a day will call out all our better feelings, if we have any, and obtain an influence over us when nothing else can. Give me the friend who, though poor in gold and silver, has always ready a sympathizing heart.

Our God knows all this well. He knows the very secrets of man's heart. He knows the ways by which that heart is most easily approached, and the springs by which that heart is most readily moved. He has wisely provided that the Saviour of the Gospel should be feeling as well as mighty. He has given us one who has not only a strong hand to pluck us as brands from the burning, but a sympathizing heart on which the labouring and heavy-laden may find rest.

I see a marvellous proof of love and wisdom in the union of two natures in Christ's person. It was marvellous love in our Saviour to condescend to go through weakness and humiliation for our sakes, ungodly rebels as we are. It was marvellous wisdom to fit Himself in this way to be the very Friend of friends, who could not only save man, but meet him on his own ground. I want one able to perform all things needful to redeem my soul. This Jesus can do, for He is the eternal Son of God. I want one able to understand my weakness and infirmities, and to deal gently with my soul, while tied to a body of death. This again Jesus can do, for He was the Son of man, and had flesh and blood like my own. Had my Saviour been God only, I might perhaps have *trusted* Him, but I never could have come near to Him without fear. Had my Saviour been Man only, I might have *loved* Him, but I never could have felt sure that He was able to take away my sins. But, blessed be God, my Saviour is God as well as Man, and Man as well as God—God, and so able to deliver me—Man, and so able to feel with me. Almighty power and deepest sympathy are met together in one glorious person, Jesus Christ, my Lord. Surely a believer in Christ has a strong consolation. He may well trust, and not be afraid.

If any reader of this paper knows what it is to go to the throne of grace for mercy and pardon, let him never forget that the Mediator by whom he draws near to God is the Man Christ Jesus.

Your soul's business is in the hand of a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities. You have not to do with a being of so high and glorious a nature that your mind can in no wise comprehend Him. You have to do with Jesus, who had a body like your own and was a Man upon earth like yourself. He well knows that world through which you are struggling, for He dwelt in the midst of it thirty-three years. He well knows "the contradictions of sinners," which so often discourages you, for He endured it Himself (Heb 12:3). He well knows the art and cunning of your spiritual enemy, the devil, for He wrestled with him in the wilderness. Surely, with such an advocate you may well feel bold.

If you know what it is to apply to the Lord Jesus for spiritual comfort in earthly troubles, you should well remember the days of His flesh, and His human nature.

You are applying to One who knows your feelings by experience, and has drunk deep of the bitter cup, for He was "a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3). Jesus knows the heart of a man, the bodily pains of a man, and the difficulties of a man, for he was a Man Himself and had flesh and blood upon earth. He sat wearied by the well at Sychar. He wept over the grave of Lazarus at Bethany. He sweat great drops of blood at Gethsemane. He groaned with anguish at Calvary.

Acquainted with Human Nature

He is no stranger to your sensations. He is acquainted with everything that belongs to human nature, sin only excepted.

(a) Are you poor and needy? So also was Jesus. The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of man had not where to lay His head. He dwelt in a despised city. Men used to say, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (Joh 1:46). He was esteemed a carpenter's son. He preached in a borrowed boat, rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed ass, and was buried in a borrowed tomb.

(b) Are you alone in the world, and neglected by those who ought to love you? So also was Jesus. He came unto His own, and they received Him not. He came to be a Messiah to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and they rejected Him. The princes of this world would not acknowledge Him. The few that followed Him were publicans and fishermen. And even these at the last forsook Him, and were scattered every man to his own place.

(c) Are you misunderstood, misrepresented, slandered, and persecuted? So also was Jesus. He was called a glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans, a Samaritan, a madman, and a devil. His character was belied. False charges were laid against Him. An unjust sentence was passed upon Him, and though innocent, He was condemned as a malefactor, and as such died on the cross.

(d) Does Satan tempt you, and offer horrid suggestions to your mind? So also did he tempt Jesus. He bade Him to distrust God's fatherly providence. "Command these stones to be made bread." He proposed to Him to tempt God by exposing

Himself to unnecessary danger. “Cast thyself down” from the pinnacle of the temple. He suggested to Him to obtain the kingdoms of the world for His own, by one little act of submission to himself. “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Mat 4:1-10).

(e) Do you ever feel great agony and conflict of mind? Do you feel in darkness as if God had left you? So did Jesus. Who can tell the extent of the sufferings of mind He went through in the garden? Who can measure the depth of His soul’s pain when He cried, “My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46).

It is impossible to conceive a Saviour more suited to the wants of man’s heart than our Lord Jesus Christ—suited not only by His power, but by His sympathy—suited not only by His divinity, but by His humanity. Labour, I beseech you, to get firmly impressed on your mind that Christ, the refuge of souls, is Man as well as God. Honour Him as King of kings and Lord of lords; but while you do this, never forget that He had a body and was a Man. Grasp this truth and never let it go. The unhappy Socinian¹ errs fearfully when he says that Christ was only man, and not God. But let not the rebound from that error make you forget that while Christ was very God, He was also very Man.

Listen not for a moment to the wretched argument of the Roman Catholic when he tells you that the virgin Mary and the saints are more sympathizing than Christ. Answer him that such an argument springs from ignorance of the Scriptures and of Christ’s true nature. Answer him, that you have not so learned Christ as to regard Him only as an austere Judge and a Being to be feared. Answer him, that the four *Gospels* have taught you to regard Him as the most loving and sympathizing of friends, as well as the mightiest and most powerful of Saviours. Answer him, that you want no comfort from saints and angels, from the virgin Mary or from Gabriel, so long as you can repose your weary soul on THE MAN CHRIST JESUS.

III. There May Be Much Weakness in a True Christian

Let us learn, in the third place, that there may be much weakness and infirmity, even in a true Christian.

You have a striking proof of this in the conduct of the disciples here recorded, when the waves broke over the ship. They awoke Jesus in *haste*. They said to Him, in fear and anxiety, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?”

There was *impatience*. They might have waited till their Lord thought fit to answer from His sleep.

There was *unbelief*. They forgot that they were in the keeping of One who had all power in His hand. “We perish.”

There was *distrust*. They spoke as if they doubted their Lord’s care and thoughtfulness for their safety and well-being. “Carest thou not that we perish?”

Poor faithless men! What business had they to be afraid? They had seen proof upon proof that all must be well so long as the Bridegroom was with them. They had witnessed repeated examples of His love and kindness towards them, sufficient to convince them that He would never let them come to real harm. But all was forgotten in the present danger. Sense of immediate peril often makes men have a bad memory. Fear is often unable to reason from past experience. They heard the winds. They saw the waves. They felt the cold waters beating over them. They fancied death was close at hand. They could wait no longer in suspense. “Carest thou not,” said they, “that we perish?”

But, after all, let us understand this is only a picture of what is constantly going on among believers in every age. There are too many disciples, I suspect, at this very day, like those who are here described.

Many of God’s children get on very well so long as they have no trials. They follow Christ very tolerably in the time of fair weather. They fancy they are trusting Him entirely. They flatter themselves they have cast every care on Him. They obtain the reputation of being very good Christians.

But suddenly some unlooked-for trial assails them. Their property makes itself wings and flies away. Their own health fails. Death comes up into their house. Tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word. And where now is their faith? Where is the strong confidence they thought they had? Where is their peace, their hope, their resignation? Alas, they are sought for and not found. They are weighed in the balances and found wanting. Fear, doubt, distress, and anxiety break in upon them like a flood, and they seem at their wits’ end. I know that this is a sad description. I only put it to the conscience of every real Christian, whether it is not correct and true.

The plain truth is that there is no literal and absolute perfection among true Christians, so long as they are in the body. The best and brightest of God’s saints is but a *poor mixed being*. Converted, renewed, and sanctified though he be, he is still compassed with infirmity. There is not a just man upon earth that always doeth good and sinneth not. In many things we offend all. A man may have true saving faith, and yet not have it always close at hand, and ready to be used (Ecc 7:20, Jam 3:2).

Abraham was the father of the faithful. By faith he forsook his country and his kindred, and went out according to the command of God, to a land he had never seen. By faith he was content to dwell in the land as a stranger, believing that God would give it to him for an inheritance. And yet this very Abraham was so far overcome by unbelief, that he allowed Sarah to be called his sister and not his wife, through the fear of man. Here was great infirmity. Yet there have been few greater saints than Abraham.

¹ **Socinian** – the heretical theological system named after Italian Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), which denied the doctrine of the Trinity by making Christ to be a mere man with no existence prior to His birth.

David was a man after God's own heart. He had faith to go out to battle with the giant Goliath when he was but a youth. He publicly declared his belief that the Lord who delivered him from the paw of the lion and bear, would deliver him from this Philistine. He had faith to believe God's promise that he should one day be King of Israel—though he was owned by few followers, and though Saul pursued him like a partridge on the mountains and there often seemed but a step between him and death. And yet this very David at one time was so far overtaken by fear and unbelief that he said, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul" (1Sa 27:1). He forgot the many wonderful deliverances he had experienced at God's hand. He only thought of his present danger, and took refuge among the ungodly Philistines. Surely here was great infirmity. Yet there have been few stronger believers than David.

I know it is easy for a man to reply, "All this is very true, but it does not excuse the fears of the disciples. They had Jesus actually with them. They ought not to have been afraid. I should never have been so cowardly and faithless as they were!" I tell the man who argues in that way, that he knows little of his own heart. I tell him, no one knows the length and breadth of his own infirmities, if he says he has not been tempted. No one can say how much weakness might appear in himself, if he were placed in circumstances to call it forth.

Does any reader of this paper think that he believes in Christ? Do you feel such love and confidence in Him that you cannot understand being greatly moved by any event that could happen? It is all well. I am glad to hear it. But has this faith been tried? Has this confidence been put to the test? If not, take heed of condemning these disciples hastily. Be not high-minded, but fear. Think not because your heart is in a lively frame now, that such a frame will always last. Say not, because your feelings are warm and fervent today, "tomorrow shall be as today, and much more abundant." Say not, because your heart is lifted up just now with a strong sense of Christ's mercy, "I shall never forget Him as long as I live." Oh, learn to abate something of this flattering estimate of yourself. You do not know yourself thoroughly. There are more things in your inward man than you are at present aware of. The Lord may leave you as He did Hezekiah, to show you all that is in your heart (2Ch 32:31). Blessed is he that is "clothed with humility." "Happy is he that feareth always." "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1Pe 5:5; Pro 28:14; 1Co 10:12).

Why do I dwell on this? Do I want to apologize for the corruptions of professing Christians, and excuse their sins? God forbid! Do I want to lower the standard of sanctification, and countenance anyone in being a lazy, idle soldier of Christ? God forbid! Do I want to wipe out the broad line of distinction between the converted and the unconverted, and to wink at inconsistencies? Once more I say, God forbid! I hold strongly that there is a mighty difference between the true Christian and the false, between the believer and the unbeliever, between the children of God and the children of the world. I hold strongly that this difference is not merely one of faith, but of life—not only one of profession, but of practice. I hold strongly that the ways of the believer should be as distinct from those of the unbeliever, as bitter from sweet, light from darkness, heat from cold.

But I do want *young Christians* to understand what they must expect to find in themselves. I want to prevent their being stumbled and puzzled by the discovery of their own weakness and infirmity. I want them to see that they may have true faith and grace, in spite of all the devil's whispers to the contrary, though they feel within doubts and fears. I want them to observe that Peter, James, John, and their brethren were true disciples, and yet not so spiritual but that they could be afraid. I do not tell them to make the unbelief of the disciples an excuse for themselves. But I do tell them that it shows plainly, that so long as they are in the body they must not expect faith to be above the reach of fear.

Above all, I want all Christians to understand what they must expect *in other believers*. You must not hastily conclude that a man has no grace merely because you see in him some corruption. There are spots on the face of the sun, and yet the sun shines brightly and enlightens the whole world. There is quartz and dross mixed up with many a lump of gold that comes from Australia, and yet who thinks the gold on that account worth nothing at all? There are flaws in some of the finest diamonds in the world, and yet they do not prevent their being rated at a priceless value. Away with this morbid squeamishness which makes many ready to excommunicate a man if he only has a few faults! Let us be more quick to see grace and more slow to see imperfections! Let us know that, if we cannot allow there is grace where there is corruption, we shall find no grace in the world. We are yet in the body. The devil is not dead. We are not yet like the angels. Heaven has not yet begun. The leprosy is not out of the walls of the house, however much we may scrape them, and never will be till the house is taken down. Our bodies are indeed the temple of the Holy Ghost, but not a perfect temple until they are raised or changed. Grace is indeed a treasure, but a treasure in earthen vessels. It is possible for a man to forsake all for Christ's sake, and yet to be overtaken occasionally with doubts and fears.

I beseech every reader of this paper to remember this. It is a lesson worth attention. The apostles believed in Christ, loved Christ, and gave up all to follow Christ. And yet you see in this storm the apostles were afraid. Learn to be charitable in your judgment of them. Learn to be moderate in your expectations from your own heart. Contend to the death for the truth that no man is a true Christian who is not converted, and is not a holy man. But allow that a man may be converted, have a new heart, and be a holy man, and yet be liable to infirmity, doubts and fears.

IV. The Power of the Lord Jesus Christ

Let us learn, in the fourth place, *the power of the Lord Jesus Christ*.

You have a striking example of His power in the history upon which I am now dwelling. The waves were breaking into the ship where Jesus was. The terrified disciples awoke Him, and cried for help. "He arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." This was a wonderful miracle. No one could do this but One who was almighty.

Make the winds cease with a word! Who does not know that it is a common saying, in order to describe an impossibility, "You might as well speak to the wind!" Yet Jesus rebukes the wind and at once it ceases. This was power.

Calm the waves with a voice! What reader of history does not know that a mighty King of England tried in vain to stop the tide rising on the shore? Yet here is one who says to raging waves in a storm, "Peace, be still," and at once there was a calm. Here was power.

It is good for all men to have clear views of the Lord Jesus Christ's power. Let the sinner know that the merciful Saviour to whom he is urged to flee, and in whom he is invited to trust, is nothing less than the Almighty, and has power over all flesh to give eternal life (Rev 1:8; Joh 17:2). Let the anxious inquirer understand that if he will only venture on Jesus, and take up the cross, he ventures on One who has all power in heaven and earth (Mat 28:18). Let the believer remember as he journeys through the wilderness, that his Mediator, Advocate, Physician, Shepherd, and Redeemer—is Lord of lords and King of kings, and that through Him all things may be done (Rev 17:14; Phi 4:13). Let all study the subject, for it deserves to be studied.

(a) Study it in His works of *creation*. "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made" (Joh 1:3). The heavens and all their glorious host of inhabitants, the earth and all that it contains and the sea and all that is in it—all creation, from the sun on high to the least worm below, was the work of Christ. He spake and they came into being. He commanded and they began to exist. That very Jesus, who was born of a poor woman at Bethlehem and lived in a carpenter's house at Nazareth, had been the Former of all things. Was not this power?

(b) Study it in His works of *providence*, and the orderly continuance of all things in the world. "By him all things consist" (Col 1:17). Sun, moon, and stars roll round in a perfect system. Spring, summer, autumn, and winter follow one another in regular order. They continue to this day and fail not, according to the ordinance of Him who died on Calvary (Psa 119:91). The kingdoms of this world rise and increase, and decline and pass away. The rulers of the earth plan, scheme, make laws and change laws, war, and pull down one and raise up another. But they little think that they rule only by the will of Jesus and that nothing happens without the permission of the Lamb of God. They do not know that they and their subjects are all as a drop of water in the hand of the crucified One, and that He increases the nations and diminishes the nations, just according to His mind. Is not this power?

(c) Study the subject not least *in the miracles* worked by our Lord Jesus Christ during the three years of His ministry upon earth. Learn from the mighty works which He did, that the things which are impossible with man are possible with Christ. Regard every one of His miracles as an emblem and figure of spiritual things. See in it a lovely picture of what He is able to do for your soul. He that could raise the dead with a word can just as easily raise man from the death of sin. He that could give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and speech to the dumb, can also make sinners to see the kingdom of God, hear the joyful sound of the Gospel, and speak forth the praise of redeeming love. He that could heal leprosy with a touch, can heal any disease of heart. He that could cast out devils can bid every besetting sin yield to His grace. Oh, begin to read Christ's miracles in this light! Wicked, and bad, and corrupt as you may feel, take comfort in the thought that you are not beyond Christ's power to heal. Remember that in Christ there is not only a fullness of mercy, but a fullness of power.

(d) Study the subject in particular *as placed before you this day*. I dare be sure your heart has sometimes been tossed to and fro like the waves in a storm. You have found it agitated like the waters of the troubled sea when it cannot rest. Come and hear this day that there is One who can give you rest. Jesus can say, to your heart, whatever may be its ailment, "Peace, be still!"

What though your conscience within be lashed by the recollection of countless transgressions, and torn by every gust of temptation? What though the remembrance of past hideous profligacy be grievous unto you, and the burden intolerable? What though your heart seems full of evil, and sin appears to drag you whither it will like a slave? What though the evil rides to and fro over your soul like a conqueror, and tells you it is vain to struggle against him, there is no hope for you? I tell you there is One who can give even you pardon and peace. My Lord and Master Jesus Christ can rebuke the devil's raging, can calm even your soul's misery, and say even to you, "Peace, be still!" He can scatter that cloud of guilt which now weighs you down. He can bid despair depart. He can drive fear away. He can remove the spirit of bondage and fill you with the spirit of adoption. Satan may hold your soul like a strong man armed, but Jesus is stronger than he—and when He commands, the prisoners must go free. Oh, if any troubled reader wants a calm within, let him go this day to Jesus Christ and all shall yet be well!

But what if your heart be right with God, and yet you are pressed down with a load of earthly trouble? What if the fear of poverty is tossing you to and fro and seems likely to overwhelm you? What if pain of body be racking you to distraction day after day? What if you are suddenly laid aside from active usefulness, and compelled by infirmity to sit still and do nothing? What if death has come into your home and taken away your Rachael, or Joseph, or Benjamin and left you alone, crushed to the ground with sorrow? What if all this has happened? Still there is comfort in Christ. He can speak peace to wounded hearts as easily as calm troubled seas. He can rebuke rebellious wills as powerfully as raging winds. He can make storms of sorrow abate and silence tumultuous passions as surely as He stopped the Galilean storm. He can say to the heaviest anxi-

ety, "Peace, be still!" The floods of care and tribulation may be mighty, but Jesus sits upon the waterfloods and is mightier than the waves of the sea (Psa 93:4). The winds of trouble may howl fiercely round you, but Jesus holds them in His hand and can stay them when He lists. Oh, if any reader of this paper is broken-hearted, and care-worn, and sorrowful, let him go to Jesus Christ and cry to Him, and he shall be refreshed. "Come unto me," He says, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mat 11:28).

I invite all who profess and call themselves Christians, to take large views of Christ's power. Doubt anything else if you will, but never doubt Christ's power. Whether you do not secretly love sin, may be doubtful. Whether you are not privately clinging to the world, may be doubtful. Whether the pride of your nature is not rising against the idea of being saved as a poor sinner by grace, may be doubtful. But one thing is not doubtful, and that is that Christ is "able to save to the uttermost," and will save you, if you will [seek] Him (Heb 7:25).

V. The Lord Jesus Deals Tenderly with Weak Believers

Let us learn, in the last place, how tenderly and patiently the Lord Jesus deals with weak believers.

We see this truth brought out in His words to His disciples, when the wind ceased and there was a calm. He might well have rebuked them sharply. He might well have reminded them of all the great things He had done for them and reproved them for their cowardice and mistrust. But there is nothing of anger in the Lord's words. He simply asks two questions. "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?"

The whole of our Lord's conduct towards His disciples on earth deserves close consideration. It throws a beautiful light on the compassion and longsuffering that there is in Him. No master surely ever had scholars so slow to learn their lessons as Jesus had in the apostles. No scholars surely ever had so patient and forbearing a teacher as the apostles had in Christ. Gather up all the evidence on this subject that lies scattered through the *Gospels*, and see the truth of what I say.

At no time of our Lord's ministry did the disciples seem to comprehend fully the object of His coming into the world. The humiliation, the atonement, the crucifixion, were hidden things to them. The plainest words and clearest warnings from their Master of what was going to befall Him seemed to have had no effect on their minds. They understood not. They perceived not. It was hid from their eyes. Once Peter even tried to dissuade our Lord from suffering. "Be it far from thee, Lord," he said, "this shall not be unto thee" (Mat 16:22; Luk 18:34; 9:45).

Frequently you will see things in their spirit and demeanour which are not at all to be commended. One day we are told they disputed among themselves who should be greatest (Mar 9:34). Another day they considered not His miracles and their hearts were hardened (Mar 6:52). Once two of them wished to call down fire from heaven upon a village, because it did not receive them (Luk 9:54). In the garden of Gethsemane the three best of them slept when they should have watched and prayed. In the hour of His betrayal they all forsook Him and fled. And worst of all, Peter, the most forward of the twelve, denied his Master three times with an oath.

Even after the resurrection, you see the same unbelief and hardness of heart cling to them; though they saw their Lord with their eyes, and touched Him with their hands, even then some doubted. So weak were they in faith! So slow of heart were they to "believe all that the prophets had spoken" (Luk 24:25). So backward were they in understanding the meaning of our Lord's words, and actions, and life, and death.

But what do you see in our Lord's behaviour towards these disciples all through His ministry? You see nothing but unchanging pity, compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, longsuffering, and love. He does not cast them off for their stupidity. He does not reject them for their unbelief. He does not dismiss them forever for cowardice. He teaches them as they are able to bear. He leads them on step by step, as a nurse does an infant when it first begins to walk. He sends them kind messages as soon as He is risen from the dead. "Go," He said to the women, "Go tell my *brethren* that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Mat 28:10). He gathers them round Himself once more. He restores Peter to his place, and bids him "feed His sheep" (Joh 21:17). He condescends to sojourn with them forty days before He finally ascends. He commissions them to go forth as His messengers, and preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. He blesses them in parting, and encourages them with that gracious promise, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Mat 28:20). Truly this was a love that passeth knowledge. This is not the manner of man.

Let all the world know that the Lord Christ is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. As a father pitieth his children, so He pitieth them that fear Him. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will He comfort His people (Jam 5:11; Mat 12:20; Psa 103:13; Isa 66:13). He cares for the lambs of His flock as well as for the old sheep. He cares for the sick and feeble ones of His fold as well as for the strong. It is written that He will carry them in His bosom, rather than let one of them be lost (Isa 40:11). He cares for the least members of His body, as well as for the greatest. He cares for the babes of His family as well as the grown-up men. He cares for the tenderest little plants in His garden as well as for the cedar of Lebanon. All are in His book of life, and all are under His charge. All are given to Him in an everlasting covenant, and He has undertaken, in spite of all weaknesses, to bring every one safe home. Only let a sinner lay hold on Christ by faith and then, however feeble, Christ's word is pledged to him, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." He may correct him occasionally in love. He may gently reprove him at times. But He will never, never give him up. The devil shall never pluck him from Christ's hand.

Let all the world know that the Lord Jesus will not cast away His believing people because of shortcomings and infirmities. The husband does not put away his wife because he finds failings in her. The mother does not forsake her infant because it is weak, feeble and ignorant. And the Lord Christ does not cast off poor sinners who have committed their souls into His hands because He sees in them blemishes and imperfections. Oh, no! It is His glory to pass over the faults of His people, and heal their backslidings—to make much of their weak graces and to pardon their many faults. The eleventh of *Hebrews* is a wonderful chapter. It is marvelous to observe how the Holy Ghost speaks of the worthies whose names are recorded in that chapter. The faith of the Lord's people is there brought forward and had in remembrance. But the faults of many a one, which might easily have been brought up also, are left alone, and not mentioned at all.

Who is there now among the readers of this paper that feels desires after salvation, but is afraid to become decided, lest by-and-by he should fall away? Consider, I beseech you, the tenderness and patience of the Lord Jesus and be afraid no more. Fear not to take up the cross and come out boldly from the world. That same Lord and Saviour who bore with the disciples is ready and willing to bear with you. If you stumble, He will raise you. If you err, He will gently bring you back. If you faint, He will revive you. He will not lead you out of Egypt, and then suffer you to perish in the wilderness. He will conduct you safe into the promised land. Only commit yourself to His guidance, and then, my soul for yours, He shall carry you safely home. Only hear Christ's voice, and follow Him, and you shall never perish.

Who is there among the readers of this paper that has been converted and desires to do his Lord's will? Take example, this day, by your Master's gentleness and longsuffering, and learn to be tender-hearted and kind to others. Deal gently with *young beginners*. Do not expect them to know everything and understand everything all at once. Take them by the hand. Lead them on and encourage them. Believe all things and hope all things, rather than make that heart sad which God would not have made sad.

Deal gently with *backsliders*. Do not turn your back on them as if their case was hopeless. Use every lawful means to restore them to their former place. Consider yourself, and your often infirmities, and do as you would be done by. Alas, there is a painful absence of the Master's mind among many of His disciples. There are few churches, I fear, in the present day, which would have received Peter into communion again for many a long year, after denying His Lord. There are few believers ready to do the work of Barnabas—willing to take young converts by the hand, and encourage them at their first beginnings. Verily we want an outpouring of the Spirit upon believers almost as much as upon the world.

Practical Applications

And now, I have only to ask my readers to make a practical use of the lessons I have brought before them. You have heard this day five things...

First, that Christ's service will not secure you against troubles. The holiest saints are liable to them.

Second, that Christ is very Man as well as God.

Third, that believers may have much weakness and infirmity, and yet be true believers.

Fourth, that Christ has all power; and

Fifth, that Christ is full of patience and kindness towards His people.

Remember these five lessons, and you will do well.

Bear with me a few moments while I say a few words to impress the things you have been reading more deeply on your heart.

(1) This paper will very likely be read by some who know nothing of Christ Himself, or of Christ's service by experience.

There are only too many who take no interest whatever in the things about which I have been writing. Their treasure is all below. They are wholly taken up with the things of the world. They care nothing about the believer's conflict, and struggles, and infirmities, and doubts, and fears.

They care little whether Christ did miracles or not. It is all a matter of words, names, and forms, about which they do not trouble themselves. They are without God in the world.

If perchance you are such a man as this, I can only warn you solemnly that your present course cannot last. You will not live for ever. There must be an end. Grey hairs, age, sickness, infirmities, death—all are before you, and must be met one day. What will you do when that day comes?

Remember my words this day. You will find no comfort when sick and dying, unless Jesus Christ is your friend. You will discover, to your sorrow and confusion, that however much men may talk and boast, they cannot do without Christ when they come to their deathbed. You may send for ministers, and get them to read prayers, and give you the sacrament. You may go through every form and ceremony of Christianity. But if you persist in living a careless and worldly life, and despising Christ in the morning of your days, you must not be surprised if Christ leaves you to yourself in your latter end. Alas! these are solemn words, and are often sadly fulfilled: "I will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh" (Pro 1:26).

Come then, this day, and be advised by one who loves your soul. Cease to do evil. Learn to do well. Forsake the foolish, and go in the path of understanding. Cast away that pride which hangs about your heart, and seek the Lord Jesus while He may be found. Cast away that spiritual sloth which is palsying your soul, and resolve to take trouble about your Bible, your prayers, and your Sundays. Break off from a world which can never really satisfy you, and seek that treasure which alone is

truly incorruptible. Oh, that the Lord's own words might find a place in your conscience! "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you" (Pro 1:22-23). I believe the crowning sin of Judas Iscariot was that he would not seek pardon and turn again to his Lord. Beware, lest that be your sin also.

(2) *This paper will probably fall into the hands of some who love the Lord Jesus, and believe in Him, and yet desire to love Him better.* If you are such a man, suffer the word of exhortation and apply it to your heart.

For one thing, keep before your mind, as an ever-present truth, that *the Lord Jesus is an actual, living Person*, and deal with Him as such.

I fear the personality of our Lord is sadly lost sight of by many professors in the present day. Their talk is more about salvation than about the Saviour, more about redemption than about the Redeemer, more about justification than about Jesus and more about Christ's work than about Christ's person. This is a great fault, and one that fully accounts for the dry and sapless character of the religion of many professors.

As ever you would grow in grace and have joy and peace in believing, beware of falling into this error. Cease to regard the Gospel as a mere collection of dry doctrines. Look at it rather as the revelation of a mighty, living *Being* in whose sight you are daily to live. Cease to regard it as a mere set of abstract propositions and abstruse principles and rules. Look at it as the introduction to a glorious, personal *Friend*. This is the kind of Gospel that the apostles preached. They did not go about the world telling men of love, and mercy, and pardon, in the abstract. The leading subject of all their sermons was the loving heart of *an actual living Christ*. This is the kind of Gospel which is most calculated to promote sanctification and meetness for glory. Nothing, surely, is so likely to prepare us for that heaven where Christ's personal presence will be all, and that glory where we shall meet Christ face to face, as to realize communion with Christ as an actual living Person here on earth. There is all the difference in the world between an *idea* and a *person*.

For another thing, try to keep before your mind, as an everpresent truth, that the Lord Jesus is utterly unchanged.

That Saviour, in whom you trust, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He knows no variableness, nor shadow of turning. Though high in heaven at God's right hand, He is just the same in heart that He was 1900 years ago on earth. Remember this and you will do well.

Follow Him all through His journeys to and fro in Palestine. Mark how He received all that came to Him and cast out none. Mark how He had an ear to listen to every tale of sorrow, a hand to help every case of distress, a heart to feel for all who needed sympathy. And then say to yourself, "This same Jesus is He who is my Lord and Saviour. Place and time have made no difference in Him. What He was, He is, and will be forevermore."

Surely this thought will give life and reality to your daily religion. Surely this thought will give substance and shape to your expectation of good things to come. Surely it is matter for joyful reflection, that He who was thirty-three years upon earth, and whose life we read in the Gospels, is the very Saviour in whose presence we shall spend eternity.

The last word of this paper shall be the same as the first. I want men to read the four Gospels more than they do. I want men to become better acquainted with Christ. I want unconverted men to know Jesus, that they may have eternal life through Him. I want believers to know Jesus better, that they may become more happy, more holy, and more meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He will be the holiest man who learns to say with Paul, "To me to live is Christ" (Phi 1:21).

