

# A LAST MESSAGE

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## PREFACE

CHRIST'S last message—that to the Church of Laodicea—has never received the attention it deserves. Perhaps until now the time had not arrived. It fits the present hour so exactly that no apology is needed for reminding the reader of its contents. An attempt is made in the following pages to bring both the warnings it contains, and the blessings it offers, to the notice of all who have "ears to hear."

Two points in that address need to be specially emphasized. The charge of lukewarmness, and Christ's offer to sup with us and we with Him. The intelligent reader will perceive that both have a distinct relation to present conditions. For lukewarmness applies not to those who were never warm, but to those who once having been devoted and zealous have cooled. Instead of Philadelphia we have Laodicea. While the supper alluded to in Revelation iii. 20 is something quite different from the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.

Oh, that some who read these pages may come to know by real experience the meaning of Christ's words, addressed to those who hear His voice and open the door, "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me!" A blessing so unique that it is almost as if the "good wine" had been kept until now. The richest blessing known in the early days of the Church did not surpass it. For what can surpass such personal communion with the Lord? May none be satisfied with less.

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
REPENTANCE . . . . .	I
LAODICEA: A LAST MESSAGE . . . . .	9
FILLED: OR FULNESS OF BLESSING . . . . .	27
THE POT OF OIL . . . . .	42
DIVINE GUIDANCE . . . . .	48
A MEDITATION ON JOHN XVII . . . . .	60
THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE . . . . .	73
THE PRESENT COMPANY OF CHRIST . . . . .	86
REVIVAL . . . . .	96
THE TOP OF THE HILL . . . . .	III

## REPENTANCE <sup>1</sup>

“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”—LUKE iii. 8.

“Be zealous therefore and repent.”—REVELATION iii. 19.

A GREAT deal of misunderstanding exists as to the nature and need of repentance.

As to its nature, it is often thought of as if it meant no more than contrition or sorrow on account of sin. But there may be this where there is no true repentance whatever. People are often sorry they have sinned, not because there is any change in their heart regarding sin itself, or any real change of attitude regarding it, but because their actions have resulted in certain unpleasant consequences. Herod was “exceeding sorry” when he found that his rash promise to the daughter of Herodias had involved him in consequences from which even he revolted.

The etymological signification of the word repent is, “change of mind.” But it is a change which does not stop short of a change of action. It has been truly said that repentance is “to do the other thing.” The parable of the two sons in Matthew xxi. 28-31 illustrates this. The first refused to obey his father’s injunction: “Go work to-day in my vineyard!” But “afterwards he repented and *went*.” The repentance was in the fact that he “*went*.” No mere sorrow for having refused would have been enough.

Had the prodigal of Luke xv. been content with the pious resolution “I will arise and go to my Father,” and had he never proceeded further than the conviction that he had sinned and was unworthy, there would not have

<sup>1</sup> Can be obtained separately. Price 1s. per dozen.

been any genuine repentance. But we read, he "arose and came to his Father."

In John's day it was not enough for people to come to his baptism or even confess their sins. He was insistent that they should bring forth fruits meet for repentance. To confess their sins, yet continue in them, was not repentance. Every tree that did not bring forth "*good fruit*" was to be hewn down.

The Apostle Paul insists upon the same thing. This is the account he gives of his commission. He was sent "to open their eyes and to turn them (or rather, 'that they may turn themselves') from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins." Which he understands to be, "That they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." Not do works meet for conversion, but for repentance. Repentance really embraces the whole. Conversion is not so much something distinct from repentance or in addition to it, as something which gives repentance its full character. For a man has not fully repented until he turns to God. So the mission of the twelve could be summed up in the words: "And they went out, and preached that men should *repent*" (Mark vi. 12).

In the same way, Peter, on the day of Pentecost, urges those who had been pricked in their heart to repent and be baptized. Being pricked in their heart was not necessary repentance. To truly repent, they must openly renounce their association with a nation guilty of putting their Messiah to death, by being baptized. And in his next discourse we find him addressing that same guilty nation and saying: "Repent ye therefore and be converted." Nothing short of absolute conversion could mean repentance.

Such then is the *nature* of repentance. What we have said is confirmed by words already quoted at the head of this paper. "Be zealous therefore and repent." The repentance is in becoming zealous, in lieu of a state of lukewarmness. In one word, repentance is both

acknowledging our need and our state, and accepting God's provision for our blessing. The goodness of God leads us to repentance. Repentance is in accepting the blessing His goodness provides, in the deep sense of our need of it. We repent in order to believe, and unless we believe our repentance is not genuine, it leads nowhere. To repeat the words already quoted from the Apostle Paul, "That they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance." Repentance is not merely sorrow for sin, as we have said, but consists in forsaking it, and in turning to God for the forgiveness He is ready to bestow. Thus our Lord sent His disciples forth in order "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name."

An outstanding definition of repentance occurs in 2 Corinthians vii. *vv.* 10, 11. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance," the Apostle declares. And then he proceeds to show in what way their true repentance manifested itself. "What carefulness is wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, etc., etc." Godly sorrow wrought these things in them. And it was in these things their repentance consisted, not in mere sorrow.

### The Need of Repentance

Having considered the *nature* of repentance, let us consider the *need* of it. The need of it at the present hour is supremely great. But our sense of the need of it is often as limited as our conception of its nature. We think of repentance as something which concerns chiefly, if not solely, the unsaved. As a matter of fact, God, both in the Old Testament and in the New, often calls upon His people to repent. The outstanding word in the addresses to the seven Churches is the word "repent," and these addresses are to Christians. In only two instances, out of the seven, the word does not occur—namely, to Smyrna and Philadelphia. To all the others, the call to repentance, in each address, constitutes its most earnest and solemn appeal.

In the last address, that to Laodicea, the Lord says, "Be zealous therefore and repent." These words again reveal the nature of repentance. It is not repent and be zealous, but "be zealous therefore and repent." The repentance consisting in zeal taking the place of "lukewarmness." It means more than sorrow for lukewarmness. It is "doing the other thing."

How solemn, then, is the thought of the need of repentance on the part of God's people ! And just as Israel were in constant need of repentance—ever needing to do the other thing—so is it to-day ; while the entire history of the Church points the same lesson. A brief review of the addresses to the Churches cannot fail to impress this upon us.

1. To Ephesus the word is, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and *repent*, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place *except thou repent*." These last words make it evident that the repentance called for consisted in doing "the first works." And "first works" meant a return to "first love." Nothing short of this could mean repentance, or would satisfy Christ.

When we consider that the lack of this repentance on the part of Ephesus would mean "the removal of the candlestick," we can see how imperative, how absolutely essential, repentance became. And this is addressed to those who had already repented as sinners, but now needed to repent as saints.

2. To Smyrna there is no call to repentance, only commendation—probably accounted for by the tribulation and poverty they were suffering.

3. But in the address to Pergamos the Lord speaks of the "sharp sword with two edges," even though there is much He can commend. But the Bride of Christ was becoming joined to the world. Separation was ceasing, and the doctrine of Balaam was held. Satan was no longer a roaring lion, but a seducing spirit. He was now attempting to gain by wiles what he had been unable to



achieve by force, and the result was that worldly conformity and clerisy were gaining ground.

In the midst of this state of things the solemn call comes; "**Repent,**" (v. 16). There could be no league between Christ and the world, no compromise. His word is "I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." Worldly Christians have Christ against them. Alas, how far in the wrong direction a worldly Church has travelled since those days! Nothing will do but *Repentance*.

4. It is easy to see by the way the Lord presents Himself to Thyatira that the evil in Pergamos has become intensified and things have assumed a character more definitely and decidedly evil. The one who takes account of this Church is no less than "the Son of God who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass." The same evil appears as in Pergamos only accentuated (Comp., vv. 14 and 20). Space had been given her to repent and she repented not (v. 21). When this is the case there is little hope. The consequence is, for the first time, a remnant is spoken of. The mass has become hopelessly corrupt. We read of "the depths of Satan." The Lord refers to His coming as if it were the only remedy, and the overcomer is addressed, before the words, "He that hath an ear" occur. The order is reversed. Surely conveying the important lesson that repentance henceforth consisted in *overcoming*. We have not overcome as long as we, in any measure, conform to the condition of things around us, whether in the world or in the Church. There is no *repentance* so long as we fail to overcome.

5. The condition of things in Sardis is very different from that described in Thyatira, and this is indicated by the way the Lord presents Himself. "These things, saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars." There has been a measure of recovery—in a section of the Church, at least—and something of its spiritual character has been apprehended. No doubt the Reformation period is here indicated. We must never

forget that while individual Churches are indicated, such as actually existed in John's day, yet, prophetically, the whole history of the Church down to the close comes into view, and each Church represents a distinct stage in its progress. But from the recovery there has been a serious lapse, and there remains little more than a *name*. "Thou hast a name, that thou livest and art dead." Yet there is the exhortation to "strengthen the things which remain." And the warning follows: "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and *repent*." Here again we learn what repentance is. Not mere sorrow for failure, but a return to the beginning: "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast" (v. 3). Nothing short of this can ever mean repentance on the part of Sardis.

6. In the address to Philadelphia, as in that to Smyrna, there is no call to repentance. There can be no doubt that the description here given has been characteristic of some of the Lord's people at a given period. That is, there has been a distinct revival on these lines. But perhaps to-day it is just here a serious warning needs to be uttered. There are not wanting those who seem carried away with the notion that little assemblies of the Lord's people supposed to be modelled on those lines actually merit the commendation bestowed upon Philadelphia. And to such an extent has this taken possession of the minds of some that they do not hesitate to think and speak of themselves as Philadelphians in character. Let us remember, it is one thing for the Lord to speak of a company as He does here, quite another for any group of Christians to apply His words to themselves. It cannot be said too plainly and emphatically that for any assembly to suppose it answers to the description given of Philadelphia is to sink at once to the worst form of Laodiceanism. Those who truly bear the character of Philadelphia are unconscious of the fact. Let us claim nothing either for ourselves individually or those in whose company we find ourselves.

It rests with the Lord alone to pronounce such a eulogy. None can say such things of themselves or even think it. Our language must be :

“ Oh to be but emptied, lowlier,  
Mean, unnoticed and unknown ;  
And to God a vessel holier,  
Filled with Christ and Christ alone.”

What the Lord may say of us, or others may say, and what we say of ourselves are very different matters. In Luke xvii. 10 we are instructed as servants to say, “ We are unprofitable servants.” It does not follow that the Lord will say this of us, but it becomes us to say it. In Luke vii. we read of the centurion, whose servant was ready to die ; that the elders of the Jews in beseeching the Lord to come and heal him said, “ That he (the centurion) was worthy for whom He should do this.” The centurion in speaking of himself says, “ I am not worthy.” So in regard to Philadelphia. The Lord alone can discern whether there exists to-day any bearing this character. Yet we have received letters quite recently in which the writer evidently had at the back of his mind the notion that he belonged to a Philadelphian Assembly. The Lord alone can pronounce judgment as to that. We believe that such ideas lead directly to the seventh and last, and, in some respects, the worst, stage of the Church, namely Laodicea.

7. It is just here we have a Church thinking and saying something of itself, which the Lord utterly repudiates. For this Church discloses a condition which no other Church, however fallen, reveals. And this evil condition is the very boastfulness of which we have spoken, namely, the claim to be something. “ Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” But how different the Lord’s estimate. “ Wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” Showing that it is our Lord’s judgment of us which matters, and not our opinion of ourselves, or, for that matter, the opinion of others. If He

has not His rightful place, nothing counts. Any lukewarmness is "nauseous" to Him. And there follows a loud call to repent, and repentance here means that zeal takes the place of coolness, and an overwhelming sense of our need of Christ replaces all self-sufficiency. Not until His voice is heard, and the door opened, and He comes in to sup with us and we with Him, has the repentance been reached, which by rebuke and chastening He seeks to produce in us.

The message to Laodicea is, in a special way, a message for our own day. And in it the Lord is calling us all to repentance. "Be zealous therefore and repent." How deep our poverty He alone knows. Yet, are we not inclined to boast in what we fancy we are? But He Who knows our poverty can make us rich. The blessing He waits to bestow is the greatest possible, if only we are in a condition to receive it. In one word it is Himself. As we confess our poverty and wretchedness and make everything of Him, He gives us the gold, the raiment and the eyesalve. And if we want Him; if His company is what we value above everything, and we hear His voice, we shall experience the truth of His promise, "I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me."

## LAODICEA : A LAST MESSAGE <sup>1</sup>

REVELATION iii. 14-22

**I**T is not inappropriate or inaccurate to call the address to the church of the Laodiceans "A last message." It is so, in the sense of being the last of the seven addresses to the churches ; but also because it deals with the last state of the Church on earth. The message, therefore, is for the Christian to-day, and has both a special and solemn word for the present time. There can be no doubt that the description given of this church is in very close correspondence with certain features in the Church as we know it ; and, therefore, the warnings and admonitions are specially to be heeded. It would be well for all of us, if we read the above passage carefully, and each one asked himself anxiously and earnestly, "What is the Lord saying to me ? Does He see in me a similar condition which He saw in the actual church of Laodicea long ago ? And if so, ought I not to pay serious attention to what He says ? " Well would it be, if every reader placed himself thus in the Lord's presence, with a sincere desire to listen to His voice.

As we shall see, the address contains the most scathing rebukes ; but at the same time the most generous offers ; accompanied by promises of the highest conceivable blessing and privilege. In spite of the present condition of things ; even though we find ourselves at the end of a dispensation, and are faced with failure and declension on every hand ; yet, if Christ's voice is

<sup>1</sup> An article on the same subject appears in the author's book, *Break of Day*. The present article, however, is entirely rewritten and contains additional matter.

heard, and there is a response, nothing short of supping with Him may be enjoyed by us—an experience unsurpassed even in the earliest days of the Church.

First, let us notice the manner in which our Lord presents Himself. It is as follows:

“These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the Creation of God.”

1. The Amen (or Verily). He is the True One. Twice in Isaiah lxxv., God is spoken of as “*the God of truth*” (Amen), and in this connection He speaks of creating new heavens and a new earth. When everything fails we can fall back upon God. He is the Amen. He will accomplish His purposes. This is the very title given to Christ here. Again everything has failed. The Church has failed just as Israel did. But here Christ assumes the very title given to God in Isaiah lxxv. The One Who confronts us at the close of all the failure of the present dispensation, is the One spoken of in 2 Corinthians i.: “For the Son of God . . . in Him was Yea. For all the promises of God, in Him are Yea, and in Him Amen” (vv. 19, 20). If we consider the place where it stands, how striking and significant is the title—the Amen. He is the affirmation and confirmation of all that God undertakes to do. He cannot fail.

2. But in addition to being the Amen, He is also “The faithful and true witness.” This is what the Church should have been. It is what Christ is. He was that on earth in all He said and did. He is that still. And when He is seen coming out of heaven (chap. xix.) He is called “Faithful and True.” He bears witness to all that God is, as well as all that man is. He can say before Pilate: “To this end was I born . . . that I should bear witness unto the truth” (John xviii. 37).

3. Finally, He is “The beginning of the Creation of God.” Referring again to Isaiah lxxv., it is remarkable that the thought of God as the Amen is linked with the thought of creation. “Behold I create new heavens and a new earth.” “Behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing.” In the passage before us there is a similar connection.

The One Who is the Amen is also "the beginning of the creation of God." Here, no doubt, it has to do more with a new and spiritual creation. Christ raised from the dead and seated at God's right hand, is the commencement of a new order. God finds all His pleasure in a Man, Who having accomplished His will on earth, even unto death, has been raised and glorified. The history of fallen man has been ended for God, and the old order set aside for ever.

Let us see in what a striking way all this bears upon what follows. This statement "The beginning of the creation of God" must be taken in connection with the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Colossians in which that truth is unfolded. For there is an intimate relation between that epistle and Laodicea. Colosse and Laodicea, to begin with, were in close proximity geographically. But, more than that, no less than four times is Laodicea mentioned in the foregoing epistle, and Laodiceans once. And in addition, the said epistle contains this injunction: "When this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the Church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea" (chaps. ii. 1; iv. 13, 15-16). So that, not only had those at Laodicea read the Epistle to the Colossians, but also some other epistle; whether addressed directly to them or not is not revealed, nor is the subject of it disclosed, nor does Paul definitely state that he wrote it, though in all probability he had done so. But it is safe to say—and this is extremely solemn—that had due attention been given by the Laodiceans to the truth unfolded in the epistle to the Colossians—which the Apostle had solemnly enjoined the Colossians to be caused to be read in the Church of Laodicea—they could never have relapsed into the sad condition depicted by our Lord. And the solemn lesson to be derived from this is: we can never afford to neglect or despise truth when it is presented to us. Such a course inevitably entails a heavy penalty. In what a different condition would the Laodiceans have been had they profited by the

Apostle's teaching ! No wonder he writes (chap. ii. 1), "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, *and for them at Laodicea.*"

Nor is it difficult to trace the effect of this neglect of his teaching in the actual condition which was the sad fruit of it. Our Lord's indictment of them is : "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Laodicea was a well-known mart, prosperous and wealthy. Thus the Lord proceeds to refer to "gold," "white raiment," and "eyesalve," for all of which Laodicea was noted. But this had to do with material wealth. Why had they become engrossed with these things ? Was it not simply because they had forgotten the exhortation to "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" ; and overlooked the truth upon which such an exhortation was founded—namely, that they were dead and risen with Christ ? They were false to the truth of their baptism.

Again, in Colossians we have the truth of new creation presented, "where Christ is everything and in all." Was He this to the Laodiceans ? Just the opposite. He is seen outside ! How little they appreciated Him ! How little they knew of having their "life hid with Christ in God" ! The neglect of the Apostle's teaching had led to their downfall. It will not be otherwise to-day if we despise or neglect the ministry He sends us through His servants.

This last description Christ gives of Himself—the beginning of the creation of God—is of special importance because it is safe to say that all the failure, confusion, and corruption which have come into the Church were due (*at the commencement*) to losing sight of the fact of which we have just spoken, namely, that in relation to Christianity all was new—a new position, new relationship, new company, a new power, a new message, and a new place, and all in relation to One God had raised from the dead. In one word, that it took its character from Man of another order—Man in heaven and not



man on earth ; one raised from the dead ; not one after the flesh. But God never gives up His truth or sinks to a lower level, if man does. And in confirmation of this, how remarkable that Christ, in this final address (which contemplates prophetically the last condition of the Church) presents Himself as "the beginning of the Creation of God." God would always recall us to the highest truth, and if we refuse this or give it up there is no knowing to what level we may sink.

How we can bless God that He has a Creation (outside the present disorder and confusion which we see around us where man's will prevails) where all takes its character from Christ and all is according to God's will.

### The State of Laodicea

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot ; I would thou wert cold or hot."

Whatever the condition of each church (and their state differs widely) there is no difference as regards this : Christ says to each, "I know thy works."<sup>1</sup> He knows all, and takes account of all. And that He does take account of all is surely a fact of solemn import. Especially does this become so as we remember one fact, namely, that He is not here addressing the world, but the Church. Unless we recognize this, and all that is involved in it, we shall neither understand the meaning of these addresses nor derive much benefit from them.

What the Lord takes account of in regard to Laodicea is a condition quite different from anything which has preceded it. We have had *loss of first love* ; worldliness ; various doctrines and practices which He condemns ; a state of deadness with merely a name to live ; but here it is a condition which is neither one thing nor the other—"neither cold nor hot."

<sup>1</sup> There would be little use in giving us seven different conditions, if the addresses had no meaning and reference beyond actually existing churches of that day, especially as these churches and their special conditions were to pass away. But if various Church periods are contemplated, this enhances the importance of such allusions.

Let us ask ourselves, before proceeding further, whether the present state of the Church (as to that part of it with which those who read these lines are most familiar) could be more accurately described?

What our Lord means by "neither cold nor hot" He proceeds to tell us. He sums it up in one word—"lukewarm." On every hand, that is the characteristic feature of the present day. There is little persecution; there is little downright opposition to the truth; nor is there, on the other hand, an outstanding devotedness, an unmistakable zeal, and an earnest contending for the faith. Indifference seems more prevalent than anything else.<sup>1</sup>

Why does the Lord say, "I would thou wert *cold* or *hot*"? *We* may be inclined to think that to be lukewarm is better than being *cold*. Our Lord evidently does not think so. He would prefer people to be one thing or the other. He seems to imply that little or nothing can be done with those whose condition is lukewarm; for one to be neither cold nor hot is not only to be unconscious of need, but almost past remedy, as we see from the words which follow:

"So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee (or, I am about to spue thee) out of my mouth."

If people are *cold*, we know at least where they are, and we know how to address them. But how can you deal with people who are neither one thing nor the other? If there is no definite indication of the condition, how can you deal with it? A neutral condition is of all conditions the most difficult to deal with. If you don't know whether a person is your enemy or your friend, how can you approach him? What arguments can you use? The only thing that can be said is what the Lord said: "I would thou wert *cold* or *hot*."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> That is, as to the general state of things. That there are exceptions is gladly admitted.

<sup>2</sup> In the history of the Church we believe it would be found that revivals have usually taken place when people had grown cold.

There is another important consideration with regard to this particular condition. A *lukewarm* state is not a state of passing from cold to hot, but from hot to cold. These Laodiceans had once been zealous. Once Christ had been "everything and in all" to them. This is why He says further on, "Be *zealous* therefore and repent." The only repentance which can meet the case is a return to their former condition.

Christ cannot endure this condition of lukewarmness! He cannot tolerate it! He will not have it! It is nauseous. And so He pronounces a verdict upon it such as is not found in any address to any other Church. His condemnation of Thyatira may sound more tragic, but here there is *contempt*. And however Thyatira may have sunk into evil, there is still a remnant to whom promises are given, but in Laodicea it is utter and contemptuous rejection.

#### Laodicea's Estimate of Herself

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Was this ever said in so many words, or did they merely think it? It matters little which it is. As we think, so are we in God's account. Does not He say, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he"? How careful we need to be as to our very thoughts! We may think a thing, without ever saying it, and be condemned for that reason, quite as much as if we had said it. Are we not reminded of the parable of the rich man? "He *thought* within himself, *saying*." "And he *said*, This will I do." "And I will *say* to my soul." Yet all the time, probably, he never uttered a single word. And then, "God said unto him, Thou fool"; though, here again, there was no audible sound. It was just how God thought of him.

In the same way Christ read the thoughts of Laodicea. The rich man had thought, "I have much goods." Laodicea similarly thought, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." And just as God and the rich man were at variance in their thoughts,

so were Christ and Laodicea. "And knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked" is Christ's verdict. What a contrast! Could anything be more tragic than to have certain thoughts about ourselves, which not only are not shared by Christ, but are entirely opposed to His view? And we have to remember that He is here addressing those who bore His Name and professed to belong to Him—those who observed the Christian ordinances, and belonged to the Christian Church. For our Lord does not make any complaint on that ground. His charge is not: "You have not been baptized" or "You have neglected the Lord's Supper." Yet He does not hesitate to address them as "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." What a challenge these words make to our own souls! And may they not well drive us to our knees, with the prayer of the Psalmist on our lips: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"?

For what guarantee is there that we may not slip into precisely the condition in which Laodicea is found? She was not always in this condition. A Church would hardly *begin* in that way. Indeed, there is no reason to suppose but that she once shared the characteristics of Philadelphia. From Philadelphia devotedness to Laodicean lukewarmness is but one process of spiritual declension. For as already indicated, lukewarmness is a process from hot to cold and not from cold to hot.

And our Lord's further words indicate that this degeneration took place *unconsciously*. How solemn!

"And *knowest not* that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

What hope is there for people who do not know their condition! or what hope for those who even go further, and deny that such is their condition! Can there be any doubt that Laodicea would have strenuously denied it? It is being done to-day. Was our Lord then

exaggerating? Was He unjust? Let us remember once more these scathing words—these words which in their severity are without alleviation and find no parallel in any of the other addresses—are spoken to a Church, and a Church which had been the recipient of written ministry from the Apostle to the Gentiles—Christ's chosen vessel—namely, the Epistle to the Colossians, with all its wealth of truth, not to speak of another epistle referred to.

What hope can there be for people who are in the condition described—wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked? Yet the Lord proceeds to offer them counsel.

### I Counsel Thee

“I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich! and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (*v.* 18).

It is said people are usually slow to accept advice or counsel, the reason no doubt being, either they consider the counsel bad, or because they do not wish to consider themselves in need of it. When, however, the Lord gives us counsel, the former view becomes impossible, but it may very well be that we do not feel our need. For how would anyone feel who really acknowledged himself to be “wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”? At least he would be ready to listen to counsel that might hold out hope of improvement, especially when offers were made so rich that his misery would be changed to blessedness.

Such are the offers Christ makes to Laodicea. If He tells her the truth as to her poverty and misery, it is because He would make her truly rich and unspeakably happy. Hezekiah had to confess, “For peace I had great bitterness,” but he learned that this was the way of deliverance, and he came to know God's love, and what it really meant to live, and at length to “sing songs to stringed instruments all the days of his life in the house of the Lord” (Isaiah xxxviii. 15–20). The process by

which we learn these lessons is always painful. Something of the bitterness has to be experienced first.

Let us consider briefly the weighty words addressed to Laodicea. The very One who has addressed to her words that leave nothing else to be said as to her wretchedness, now makes the most lavish offers, such as hardly can be excelled anywhere else in Scripture. Have we ever given due consideration to the offers contained in verse 18, or pondered sufficiently what it must mean to receive from Christ the gold, and white raiment and eyesalve? The blessings offered are the greatest possible.

First, let us consider for a moment who it is makes the offer. We have already noticed this in our contemplation of Him as the "Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the Creation of God." If One of whom all this is true makes us an offer, its value must be of untold worth. And how blessed to consider that He says, "Buy of ME." He does not send them elsewhere. For the simple reason that no one else can offer what He offers. No other market is open; no other source of supply is available; He and He alone has such gold; such white raiment; such eyesalve. Let us think what it means for Christ to make us this offer. He does not wish us to go elsewhere. He wants to supply our need.

But next, why *buy*? Is not everything a *gift*? Forgiveness, salvation, eternal life, are these not all free, "without money and without price"? Yes. But we are not here on the ground of Isaiah lv. or John iii. 16. It has been well said, "Everything is a gift to begin with, but every blessing after this has to be paid for." In other words, the *proof* that these blessings are ours by a *gift*, is how much we are prepared to surrender to *make* them ours. That is, consciously ours. Or again, there are blessings offered to us in Christ on the ground of His sacrifice. His precious blood is the purchase price. They become ours by faith. And there are blessings we only obtain by *asking* for them. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and

it shall be opened unto you." Our Lord is not dealing with sinners here who have never believed and never made any profession. Such an one cannot be *lukewarm*. Such a term would be entirely inapplicable. A sinner as such is cold and dead. And for this reason our Lord says "buy." "You must bring something, and exchange it for what I have to offer."

But there is another reason, probably, why the term "buy" is employed here. As already indicated, Laodicea was a prosperous mart and noted for the manufacture of a dress material of fine texture, and also for eyesalve. Material wealth was doubtless abundant. And the Apostle may have had this in mind when he directed that the epistle containing the exhortation, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth," should be read by the Church of the Laodiceans. Wealth can minister to our life down here; it plays no part in the life which is "hid with Christ in God." There Christ only counts.

Accordingly our Lord approaches them along lines calculated to make the strongest and most direct appeal, namely, that of commerce. And this is why He speaks of gold, white raiment, and eyesalve. It is as if He said: "You have your gold, your dress fabric, your eyesalve, for which you are famous, and yet having all this, you are 'wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.'" "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."

We are not likely to be so foolish as to suppose that the Lord, in saying this, was prepared to compete with them in their own market, or was offering them anything of a kindred nature to what they already possessed. The things he mentions are, of course, not of a material nature. Then what are they? Is this not just where we sometimes miss the point of Scripture and our own blessing, by being more anxious to know about things

than we are to *possess* them? That they are spiritual, goes without saying. But suppose we could label the gold as meaning this, and the white raiment as meaning that, and the eyesalve something else, would it necessarily mean we were real gainers in any sense? "Oh, but," someone says, "if we know what they are, then we can seek to obtain them." Just so. And this seeking to obtain *them* is in reality to miss them altogether. For it is only as we seek CHRIST that we shall ever find them. He is the gold, and white raiment, and eyesalve. And this fact lends tremendous force to the words: "Buy of ME." It is not something apart from Christ. And so we must each go to Christ for himself and herself to find out what they are.

"Buy of ME." There must be personal dealing with Christ—traffic with Christ—if these things are to be possessed. And they cannot be possessed in any other way. They are not something apart from Him.

Buy! Buying means *paying*. When we buy we exchange one thing for another. What are we prepared to pay? That is the crucial question! If we are to have Christ, it can only be at the cost of something else. And yet that something else is worthless in comparison with what we are to receive in exchange. And this is the amazing part of the transaction. The amazing thing is—and we do not think this is going too far—what our Lord really meant was this: "Bring your wretchedness, misery, poverty, blindness and nakedness to Me, and exchange it all for what I will give!! It may very nearly break your heart to see yourself as I see you, but you will learn My worth, and that all I have may be yours. You will exchange what you are for what I am, and I am 'the beginning of the Creation of God.'"

Was not this what the Apostle meant when he wrote to the Philippians, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ"? "Yea doubtless," he proceeds, "and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but



refuse that I may win Christ." (Have Christ for my gain.) Paul was no Laodicean. He mentions all that would have brought him credit from a religious and moral point of view, and in the eyes of men. But all that brought gain to him as a man meant so much less of Christ, and he refused it.

Our interpretation of verse 18 we think is justified by what our Lord further says in verse 20. For what would gold and white raiment and eyesalve avail if Christ were outside? He asks for a place in our hearts, and if that is accorded Him, and His presence is known, and His company becomes everything, then all that verse 18 speaks of becomes ours. Again, let us turn to Philip-pians iii. to explain Revelation iii. To have Christ for our gain, is not that gold *tried in the fire*? All that we part with to obtain it is what the fire will consume. To "be found in Him," is not that the white raiment? And if we have the same desire as the Apostle expresses in the words, "That I may know Him," is it not because our eyes have been anointed with eyesalve? Then it is we see everything in the light of His resurrection, and the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus becomes the goal we aspire to reach, in order to possess all that we have been taken possession of for. Is not all summed up in the words: "Christ everything, and in all"? (Col. iii. 11).

### Christ is here Seen Outside

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

This is often taken as a text on which to found an appeal to sinners. The mischief of this is that the *true* application is often lost. In the first place, there is no mistaking the fact that the words are addressed to a Church, and not to the unconverted as such. In the next, they are addressed to a community and not to an individual, though the individual is called upon to hear. Thirdly, the sinner is never addressed quite in the lan-

guage employed here—to open the door ; nor are the words, “ I will sup with him and he with Me ” altogether appropriate as between the *sinner* and Christ. This represents more the privilege of saints.

What grace is seen in our Lord’s action here ! Think of the state of those he addresses. So presumptuous as to say they are “ rich and increased with goods and have *need of nothing* ” ; so destitute as to be “ wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” And the first only intensifies the other and makes Laodicea more despicable, and all the more to be despised. Yet it is to such Christ says, “ If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.” Could grace go further ? If they will only listen to Him and receive Him, in spite of what they are, and in spite of all their lukewarmness toward Him, He will even sup with them, and they shall enjoy the closest fellowship with Him. It is the eleventh hour, so to speak ; the last opportunity. He is about to reject them, and reject them with something approaching contempt and loathing—to spue them out of His mouth. But He will make one last effort to recover them and retrieve the situation. He stands at the door and knocks, and His voice can be heard seeking admission. And this is His attitude to those who had been lukewarm toward Him.

And He offers them the best. In the palmiest days of the Church, there was nothing better to be had than what He offers here. No richer experience was known by those still retaining their first love than is placed within the reach of those in whose favour so little can be said. “ I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.” He offers them His own company. What more can He offer them ? At the beginning they had no more. Does it not show that nothing less will do ? Does not the very fact that it is Himself and His company and the closest communion with Him that He presents to them only prove that nothing short of this will do ? And that no matter what else we may think

we have, unless we give Him His place, all else loses its value in His eyes? And therefore it is not for anyone to say, “*This* cannot apply to me, I am a believer,” for that is not the question here.<sup>1</sup> The one question we are faced with here is, Do I hear His voice and open the door? The very greatness of the offer to Laodicea will only leave them, if rejected, with a final and overwhelming condemnation as a consequence. It must be His company or utter rejection. There is nothing between.

It is well to notice every word in this twentieth verse. First, our Lord’s position and attitude, He stands at the door and knocks. At the beginning He is seen *in the midst*, now He is outside. Then, the attention is fixed upon seven golden candlesticks; here, it is a closed door. There, He is majestic and attired as a judge; here, He is almost a suppliant. In Revelation i. the message is to the seven Churches; now it is, “If any man hear My voice.”

Can we mistake the significance of this change? The very position the Lord takes, the fact of the closed door, the state of those within, and last, but by no means least, the words “If any man,” all declare that a crisis has been reached. There is no hope of corporate recovery. But there is the promise to the individual that if any man hears Christ’s voice and opens the door, He will come in and they shall sup together—the richest blessing shall be his.

And one other fact proves that we are brought face to face with the end of Church history here. And it is the reference to the Kingdom in verse 21. Not only is it “if any man hear My voice,” but the promise to the overcomer is, he shall “sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with My Father in His throne.”

### Thyatira

The correspondence between what is here stated and what is said to the remnant in Thyatira is worthy of

<sup>1</sup> We must always remember that what Scripture says of a true believer is one thing; what a person who thinks he is a believer says about himself may be quite another.

notice. There the overcomer is promised power over the nations and that he shall rule them. While the expression "My Father" occurs in the addresses to both Churches. But there is a more intimate tone in what is said to Laodicea. It is to "any man" (intensely individual), for here there is not even a remnant. The overcomer in Thyatira is indeed promised "the Morning Star," but to Laodicea the word is he shall "Sit *with Me* in MY throne." Christ has not been given His own throne yet; He is seated with His "Father in His throne." No doubt this is a special honour the Father has conferred upon His beloved Son, and is intended as an answer to all the shame and obloquy heaped upon Him by man. But the hour is at hand when He will be seated on His own throne; and He promises to confer upon the overcomer in Laodicea a similar honour to that which the Father has conferred upon Him.

We see then that in the case of both Thyatira and Laodicea the attention is directed, not to any recovery in the Church, but to what will immediately succeed the Church period—the Kingdom. The condition described in both the one and the other is probably the outstanding feature of the present day. Of Sardis it is said "Thou hast a name, that thou livest and art dead," with just "a few names," and Philadelphia has degenerated into the lukewarmness of Laodicea, so to those who admit the One Who stands at the door and knocks the promise is of a somewhat similar character as that to the remnant in Thyatira, and the words "he shall sit with Me in My Throne" speak of the Kingdom being at hand.

Few, if any, may know if Christ is supping with us and we with Him; none may see Him enter at the opened door, but in that coming day all shall know if we are seated with Him on His throne.

Yes, He Who is seated on His Father's throne is He Who actually seeks the company of His own now, and asks us to admit Him. The pomp and pride of Christendom He does not value. In the lukewarmness of Laodicea He finds nothing that can gratify Him. But

he does appreciate the "open door," and He will come in to *him* and will sup with *him* who hears His voice, and responds to His knock.

His promise is, "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." He will do more than enter. He did more than enter the home in that village of Emmaus long ago when the two whom he had joined on their homeward journey invited Him to remain, saying, "Abide with us." We read, "He went in to tarry with them." How much this meant, the sequel discloses. It meant even more than that wonderful discourse along the road. He supped with them, and in that supping disclosed Himself. It was the climax and fitting conclusion of that unfolding of the Scriptures which made their hearts burn. He supped with *them*. He had entered into their need, and how great that need was—a need which really concerned their faith in Him, and grew out of all that had happened in regard to Him. They were sad, perplexed, disappointed, afraid. He leads them to tell Him all. And then he speaks. But now He does more. He sups with them. And in a moment, all is changed. "He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him." What a supper this proved! Was any meal ever more blessed, or more fruitful in result? When they knew Him, they knew all. He is ready to sup with us in the same way.

But we do well to notice one thing, in order to understand the *conditions* on which He sups with us, as well as what it means. These two were deeply interested in all that concerned Him; and the happening of the past day or two were so momentous that everything else was overshadowed and forgotten. We read, "They talked together of all these things which had happened." Are we moved in anything like the same way? "Oh, but we understand all about it," someone may say. Yes, that is just it. We understand all about it, or think we do! Or, "It happened so long ago," says another. And yet if HE has His place in our affections, and the

Holy Spirit is ungrieved, the remembrance of Him and of all He has done, can never grow dim.

Further, He "talked with them" by the way. They felt the effect of His presence and His words. And, lastly, they desired more of His company. We must know something of these things if the secret of knowing what it is for Him to sup with us is to be ours. In other words, we must hear "His voice."

Why does the Lord add, "And he with Me"? If He sups with us, is not that enough? This is indeed a marvellous privilege, but the other is something more. We have seen that at Emmaus all was connected with what they were passing through, though all that was connected with Himself. As indeed all is, whether He sups with us or we with Him. But in the former, it is our side and what we may be feeling, but in the latter it is His side. Not what we may be passing through on account of our testimony and conflict in regard to Him, but all that belongs to Himself and His own sphere. And when He brings us there, can any joy surpass that? If Luke xxiv. gives us the one, as to its general character, does not John i. give us the other? In response to the challenge, "What seek ye?" the two disciples who were following reply, "Master, where *dwellest Thou*?" And we read, "They came and saw where HE dwelt, and abode with HIM that day." Nothing is disclosed in detail of what took place. There is no record of those hours. Perhaps that makes the incident all the more impressive and significant. We must find these things out for ourselves. But the words, "Where he dwelt," and "Abode with Him," are surely enough. What an atmosphere filled the place where He dwelt! What communications we receive when we abide with Him! The Father and the Father's love are what He delights to make known. He leads us to the source of His own joy and peace, and we learn something of what the Father is to Him and He is to the Father.

## FILLED : OR FULNESS OF BLESSING <sup>1</sup>

“Filled with (or to) all the Fulness of God.”—EPHESIANS iii. 14-21.

“**W**ILT Thou not revive us again that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?” So prayed the Psalmist. Reviving leads to rejoicing. The following pages indicate how this happy experience may be enjoyed by the individual believer, whatever the general state around him. The writer seeks to pass on what he has tasted for himself. We are living in days of public failure and individual slackness, yet the blessing still available for those who truly seek the Lord is immense. He will not fail any who seek Him, but is ready to give all to those who are truly in earnest for the highest. Indeed, it is in days such as these, when the outward and visible fail us, that the Lord reveals Himself in a peculiar and special way to the seeking soul.

Nothing less than what the Apostle desired for believers in his day may be ours. His desires for his fellow Christians found expression in that wonderful prayer recorded in Ephesians iii. 14-19. He could not go beyond what he there asks. Yet there is nothing in that prayer but what we may ask for ourselves and obtain. The earnest desire of the writer is that this may be the enjoyed portion of all who read the following pages.

Filled ! Have you ever noticed how often this word

<sup>1</sup> Can be obtained separately. Price 1½d. or 1s. 3d. per dozen.  
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occurs in the epistles, and in connection with the experience of the believer? The teaching of the New Testament seems unmistakably to point to the fact that to be "filled" is not some exceptional experience, to be realized only by a few, but expresses what should be the normal condition of the ordinary believer.

Take a few passages as an example. "The God of hope *fill you* with all joy and peace in believing." "The *fulness* of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ." "*Filled* with (or to) all the *fulness* of God." "*Filled* with the Spirit." "*Full* of goodness, *filled* with all knowledge" (Romans xv. 13, 14, 29; Ephesians iii. 19; v. 18).

It is not a little remarkable that three of these passages occur in one chapter, viz. Romans xv.; and occur at the close of the marvellous unfolding of the Gospel given us in that epistle, which seems to corroborate what has been said already that to be *filled* is looked upon as a blessing every believer should enjoy. It should be the portion of all who have received the Gospel. Is it not then worth while to ask whether the words quoted above are descriptive of ourselves, and whether our own experience in any way answers to such a standard? Is not the experience of Christians generally on a lower level?

We are not thinking merely of those who have been nurtured in forms and ceremonies, or those who have never listened to the full tale of God's grace, the same query may be made concerning many who have been taught the truth as revealed in Scripture, and who to some extent seek as individuals and Church members to act according to it.

Strange as it may seem, the very correctness of our views may prove a snare to us, if tempted to be satisfied with the mere possession of them. For views, however correct, are not enough. It is possible to become imprisoned within the letter of Scripture. To be content merely with the fact that no text can be adduced to prove our doctrines or position wrong may leave the soul empty and dry.



### Position and Condition

It has been well said that "*Condition* is more important than *position*." While every statement of this kind must be accepted with a measure of reserve, yet it embodies an important truth. A correct position is of immense value. But position without power—position without a corresponding condition—is not of itself sufficient. Whether we think of our place before God in Christ, or of a right ecclesiastical position here on earth, if there is the neglect of an inward spiritual state, and the soul is left without exercise, barrenness and feebleness are the result. To attempt to maintain a great position on a small income must sooner or later prove disastrous.

There is the constant swing of the pendulum, which has to be guarded against. Position may unduly occupy us, or, the knowledge of the truth objectively, or, on the other hand, we may be too much engaged with our condition—too introspective—too much occupied with ourselves. Throughout the history of the Church, believers have become engrossed with one of these aspects of truth rather than with the other. The fact is, both are true, and our chief concern should be to maintain a proper equipoise; for both are necessary to a healthy condition of soul.

At the present time many who are assured of their blessings in Christ, on the ground of His finished work—in other words, with what has been done for them—are very little concerned as to the work of the Holy Spirit, or what God is doing, or would do, in them. Now, if the blessings we mentioned at the beginning are to be realized—if we are to be "filled"—both a right position before God and a corresponding condition are essential. The Gospel does not end with Romans v. 1: "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." That is the objective side, and is the result of believing what God says about the work of Christ, and what is involved in the fact of God having

raised Him from the dead. But are we content with that? How can the mere fact that God has nothing against us satisfy us? Do we not wish to know something of God and what He can be to us? The chapter referred to goes on to speak of the love of God "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Are we learning all that God is to us in and through the death of His Son?

### Two Ways of Knowing a Thing

Here are the two sides we are speaking of. First, no condemnation, that is true of every believer in Christ. That is my *position* before God. Next, the love of God shed abroad in the heart. That is my *condition*; and is a matter of growth and experience, and is connected with the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not a question here of whether God loves us or not. That is fully made known in the Cross. It is a question how far we consciously enjoy it. Is the love, fully made known in the death of Christ, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit?

Now, this brings us to the point we wish to emphasize. We may know the one without knowing the other. We all know that God loves us, on the authority of His Word, and because Christ has died. But this is not the same as the love being shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. There are always two ways of knowing a thing. Knowing it on authority, and knowing it consciously. For example: Two men *know* that a terrible railway accident has occurred. The one has gained his knowledge through reading of it in the paper. He knows of it on authority, and he believes it happened. The other man was in it. He felt the shock and saw the horrors of it. He knows of it consciously and by experience. There is all the difference in the world in the effect of that accident upon the two men.

It is not otherwise in the way we enter into Christian blessing. We may know we have the forgiveness of

our sins on the authority of God's Word. Just as the woman we read of in Luke vii. knew that her sins were forgiven because Christ had said to her, "Thy sins are forgiven." But in the case of the prodigal, in Luke xv., nothing is *said* by the father as to forgiveness. How did the son know he was forgiven? He was kissed. "His father ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him." Both the woman in the one case, and the son in the other, knew they were forgiven; but they knew it in different ways. The love of God shed abroad in the heart is like the kiss. Oh, the silent rapture of it! Have we ever experienced it?

And it is just here that so many come short. We know our position, but our condition is defective. We are not *filled*. It is sadly possible for a person to be very clear as to his position in Christ, and yet to be in a low, enfeebled state of soul. Easy to be quite sure of heaven, and to speak without hesitation of forgiveness, and yet be without exercise, and with little concern as to spiritual progress. To be amongst those who say, "We got everything when we were converted," and stop there. How easy it is to drop into a Laodicean state: "I am rich and increased with goods and *have need of nothing!*"

Now it is from this very condition we need to be aroused.

### **An Outward Ecclesiastical Position**

There is another way of regarding the matter. The one whose aphorism we have quoted—"Condition is more important than position"—was referring, as we happen to know, to an outward ecclesiastical position. A supposed correct ecclesiastical position is a snare to not a few. In one respect, we cannot value it too highly, for it may be the means of the greatest blessing, and lead to the most beneficent results, both in regard to God's glory and the spiritual prosperity of the individual. While to move away from it may spell disaster. Years ago, God restored for many of His people a true position,

where He could come to them and bless them. But like every privilege, it has been abused. When such a position becomes an end in itself—when it becomes the chief concern with those who think they occupy it—when it becomes a matter for boasting, we have lost the advantage we might otherwise have gained. God gave the Jewish people a place of outward privilege, but they so abused it as to become worse than the Gentiles. When they became “haughty because of God’s holy mountain,” disaster was the result. For greater privileges bring greater responsibilities, and, when used for self-aggrandisement, a greater downfall. This was the case with the nation of Israel when they were content to glory in position without a corresponding condition.

Neither the knowledge of the position grace has given us in Christ before God, nor a correct Church position on earth, is sufficient. Nor do they together comprise all that we should seek. How easy it is to boast in being gathered to the Lord’s Name, and yet occupy such a position without power or spiritual apprehension. It may be mere empty formality.

Luke ii. furnishes us with an example, in the case of Simeon, of one whose condition answered to his position. We read, “There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon” (*v.* 25). What better place, or what place of greater privilege, could there be than Jerusalem! The city of the great King; the place of his habitation! Of which it could be said: “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.” “Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house,” said one, “and the place where Thine honour dwelleth.” And Simeon was worthy of the place. His very name is suggestive, it means “hearer.” To have ears to hear is a most important possession, as Revelation ii. and iii. tell us. “The same man,” we read, “was just and devout.” In other words, “righteous” and “pious.” Righteous in his dealings with men, and one who lived in communion with God. But more than this, he was

intelligent as to God's purpose—he waited “for the consolation of Israel.” And in addition, he had this supreme blessing: “the Holy Ghost was upon him.”

Such was the man God could use for His purpose—one in a right position and characterized by practical righteousness, and by the Holy Ghost. We must be sanctified and meet, if the Master is to use us; and so Simeon was selected as God's agent at a supreme moment. “He came by the Spirit into the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus . . . then took he Him up in his arms and blessed God.” God did not allow *anyone* to do this. The man that was to be permitted to fill this holy office, and hold the child Jesus in his arms, was a Spirit-filled man, and one who was worthy. The right man in the right place! If he had not been in Jerusalem, he would have lost the opportunity; but equally, if he had not been the man he was, he would not have been fitted for the opportunity.

### Ephesians iii. 14-21

A right position, and a right condition in that position, are what we should most of all covet. The epistle to the Ephesians calls our attention to this in a very remarkable way. In Chapter i. we have set before us our place before God in Christ—chosen in Him, and accepted in the Beloved, redeemed and forgiven. Chapter ii. unfolds to us our position on earth. No middle wall separating Jew and Gentile any longer; but both made one, “one new man,” “one body,” “one building,” “one family”—“an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

But in Chapter iii. we have the state which corresponds with such a position, and which alone can enable us to enjoy it and glorify God in it. For this we must turn to the prayer of the apostle, given in verses 14-21. And the fact that the apostle is led to bow his knees in prayer to the Father, is surely sufficient indication that this aspect of the truth is of the utmost importance.

It is not enough to know that certain things are true of us in an objective sense ; that is, as presented to faith ; without a subjective state ; that is, a work in us by the Spirit. This subjective state is the main subject of the apostle's prayer.

The first petition is that the Father would grant them " to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." This is the first need, for without being thus strengthened inwardly we are quite unable, even if we have the desire, to apprehend the purpose of God in Christ, or occupy our place of privilege on earth in any real way, even though we may have accepted both in our minds as the teaching of the Bible.

The consequence of being thus strengthened is that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. The Spirit's work is with a view to Christ holding a supreme place in our affections. That is, that we may apprehend by faith the place Christ fills in the purpose of God as Head of His body the Church, and our place with Him. Alas ! how content we are to think of Him merely as a Saviour from sin and its punishment. But the Holy Spirit would lead us into the apprehension of our union with Him ; and to see that according to the eternal purpose of God we share His place and relationship as Sons in the glory given Him by the Father. Christ—the Beloved, the true Joseph : Christ the centre of all the purposes of God, is to dwell in our hearts by faith ; so that He becomes the object of our affections—Christ everything and in all. So that He Who fills all things, fills our hearts. And from that point we look out upon the vast scene of the heavenly inheritance which His glory fills, and which one day we shall share. The purpose of God becomes of the deepest interest to us.

The effect of this will be, we shall be " rooted and grounded in love." Christ would not dwell in our hearts apart from making God's love known. The love in which He ever dwells is made known to us by His presence. His presence brings an atmosphere of love into the soul. The apostle bows his knees unto the

Father. If the One Who ever dwells in the bosom of the Father, and knows all the love of it, dwells in our hearts, He does so to make that love a reality to us. The love which has given us to share the inheritance with Christ.

Two figures are here used. That of a tree, and that of a building. A tree flourishes and becomes stable by striking its roots into the soil and spreading them far and wide. It thus draws up into itself all that is necessary to its life and growth. So the tendrils of our hearts are to take root in the very love of God, drawing that love up into our very being. A building needs to be well founded. What will enable us to withstand the storm and stress of life is to be well grounded in love. "Secure whatever ill betide."

And this is "in order that" (these words need to be supplied) we "may be able to comprehend (apprehend) with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of God's purpose, that eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, "which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God," and was in His mind before creation. In the previous part of this chapter, the Apostle has already referred to this, and given us a wonderful insight into the meaning and intention of creation, as a scene where the glory of Christ and the Church would be displayed. So he declares, God created all things "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God." For this reason the Apostle prays that we might be strengthened with might by God's Spirit, and be rooted and grounded in love in order to apprehend that eternal purpose which is the fruit of God's love and power, and which will be for the display of His "all various wisdom." Of old He had said to Abraham, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward and southward and eastward and westward for all the land which thou seest to thee will I give it."

So now He invites us to apprehend the sphere of glory in which Christ and the Church will be displayed.

### The Love of Christ

But behind all this, and better than all, there is the love of Christ, and the Apostle prays that, in addition to apprehending the extent of God's purpose, they might "know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." There is love as well as glory. God is love, and He has so made us, and recreated us in Christ, that love alone can satisfy us. For what would all the glory be worth, and the vastness of the inheritance, if we did not know His feelings about us and His desire for us? The purpose can be apprehended. The love passes all knowledge—immeasurable and unutterable. And here the Apostle adds something else of which we should never have dreamed. We are to be "filled into all the fulness of God." When the love of God is told out, all has been told. The very heart of God is revealed in the Cross, and all His purposes of love made known; so that we may be filled into His fulness. That which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God is now made known—His purpose concerning Christ and the Church. And, in addition, the love Christ manifested in giving Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God, is so great that it contained the revelation of Divine love in all its perfection. The very fulness of God is reached.

Thus we may be filled—"filled into all the fulness of God." Not that we can contain that fulness, but we may be "filled" like a vessel filled in the ocean. Is it so, dear reader? Are you conscious of having tasted the very fulness of love displayed in the Cross, on the one hand, and in all that God is prepared to do for us who are saved, on the other? Let me beseech you not to be satisfied until the Apostle's prayer is answered in your case, and each section of it finds a response in your own experience. Strengthened with might by His Spirit; Christ dwelling in your heart; rooted and



grounded in love; apprehending God's purpose for "all saints"; knowing the love of Christ which passeth knowledge; and thus "filled unto all the fulness of God." How easy it is to know all this as to the mere letter of it! How widely different to know it in its reality as taught by the Spirit!

### How the Blessing may become Ours

And now a few words as to the means by which this experience—the highest possible—may become ours.

1. First of all there must be the *desire*. We trust that, after reading the foregoing, no one will say: "This is beyond me, I have no interest in it, and no desire for it." Or, on the other hand, "Well, of course, I know all about it, and it is all mine, because I am a believer." A sufficient answer to both these attitudes, as well as a complete exposure of their falsity, is found in the fact that the Apostle *prays* that these things might be true of the saints at Ephesus without distinction; and it is more than probable that his desire embraced all Christians among the Gentiles. "That He would grant you according to the riches of His glory" is his request. And this request is made on behalf of those amongst whom he had laboured for three years, and to whom he had declared the whole counsel of God. If the Apostle could so earnestly desire this, it is certain he was not asking for something which was beyond them, on the one hand, or something they possessed, as a matter of course, on the other. Should the desire be lacking or should it need kindling to a greater flame, the way to obtain both is by prayer. Can we do otherwise than desire for ourselves what the Holy Spirit desires for us, as expressed in the Apostle's prayer?

2. For, secondly, prayer is the means by which these blessings are obtained. And if the Apostle could pray for these things for others, surely they should ask for them on their own behalf. "Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened

unto you." Is it not remarkable that the Apostle does not present these blessings to their notice merely in the way of teaching or exhortation but prays God to bestow them? And it is important, too, to observe what it is the Apostle asks for. He does not pray that God would grant them the forgiveness of their sins, or justification, or the knowledge of acceptance, or even that He would bless them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. All these become ours when we believe. But there are other blessings which only become ours when we ask for them. And these are the blessings the Apostle mentions here.

Let us then make his prayer our own. This is a prayer which the Holy Spirit would teach us all to pray. Well would it be for our spiritual welfare if every day such petitions ascended from our lips to the Father, as the expression of the deepest desire of our hearts. And let us not be satisfied until every petition is definitely answered. Can we be too indifferent or too lazy to ask for that which God is so willing to give, and which so deeply concerns our own blessing?

3. The process which will lead to the obtaining of the blessing may not always be pleasant, for we cannot be *filled* without first being *emptied*. This is unavoidable. A vessel must be emptied of one thing before it can be filled with another. However painful this process may be, it is well worth while. What we shall lose is worthless compared with that which we shall gain. So many things occupy our hearts and distract our attention, which cannot be called sins; yet they rob us of our true portion and hinder our highest happiness. We cannot be filled with "joy and peace in believing" while worldly desires occupy us, or discontent sours us, and unbelief hides the face of God; and so much time and strength are wasted in the pursuit of that which brings no real satisfaction. Let us examine ourselves, and see if our supreme desire and aim is to be strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the *inner man*, or whether the *outer man* is claiming too

much of our attention. Many a Christian is beautifully and becomingly attired outwardly, who is content to go in rags inwardly. It cannot be said of such: "The King's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold." Christ counsels us to buy of Him "gold tried in the fire that we may be rich and white raiment that we may be clothed, that the shame of our nakedness do not appear." This has to do with the inner man, not the outer. And these words were spoken to Christians.

Then, further, do we desire that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith? Or are we content to know that Christ suffered for us on the Cross and that has made everything safe? Is that all we want Him for?

### Solomon's Song

Solomon's Song does not carry us so far as the prayer of the Apostle in Ephesians iii., but there is a great deal to be learnt from that choice production, nevertheless. Its theme is the greatest of all themes—LOVE. There we have presented to us a most wonderful picture. Two people absolutely bound up with each other and devoted to one another. To each there is no one else in all the world like the other. They find in each other's company all they long for, and if separation comes in there is no rest until communion is restored. To him she is the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys, and however many queens and others there may be, she is apart from all and better than all: "My dove, my undefiled is but one." To her he is "the chiefest among ten thousand . . . yea he is altogether lovely." She can speak only of her beloved, whose love is better than wine. And he can speak of the love he has for her as a love strong as death, which many waters cannot quench; and on this ground he can say: "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm." A claim that only love can make.

This song is really one which finds its answer in the love of Christ to the believer, and of the believer to

Christ. If love meant so much to the two in Solomon's Song, what will not the love of Christ mean to the one who knows himself to be the object of it? What an additional reason for making the prayer of Ephesians iii. our own! Shall we not pray that we may be "rooted and grounded" in a love that gave all that love could give, for He spared not His own Son; and for a deeper knowledge of a love which is knowledge surpassing—strong as death, which many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown?

What response do we make to the appeal of Christ's love? If we know anything of a love which passeth knowledge, shall we not desire above all else that He may dwell in our hearts by faith? But is there room for Him there? Are the spaces not already too crowded? Do we not need to search our hearts to see what is robbing us of this supreme blessing? There was no room once for Him in the inn. Is there to be no room for Him in our hearts? The blessing we may enjoy to-day is summed up in Christ's own words: "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. iii. 20). In Solomon's Song, to which we have referred, all seems summed up in three words: "He" and "Me" and "Us." So it is as between Christ and ourselves. "I with him"; "He with Me." All heaven and all blessing lie between those two words, "He" and "me." "I will sup with him." He comes down to us. We know Him near. And then "He with Me." Here we are lifted out of ourselves and above ourselves. He brings us to "the banqueting house and his banner over us is love, and His fruit is sweet to our taste." "Come and see" is what He said to those two disciples who followed Him, and "They came and saw where He dwelt and abode with Him that day." They supped with Him. And even though much has changed since then, that is the blessing we may still enjoy. Shall we not make room for Him?

For our enjoyment of the love of the Father and of

the Son is only possible as Christ possesses us. All depends upon the place we give Him. "*If a man love Me . . . My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.*" "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Because love of the world means indifference to Christ. So when the Apostle speaks of Christ dwelling in our hearts he immediately refers to our being rooted and grounded in love (which, no doubt, is the Father's love); and then of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. And we need first to be *empty* enough in order that this love may fill us. For we are to be *filled*—"filled unto all the fulness of God." Who would not be empty in view of the possibility of such a filling? Let us open our hearts to the full tide which is ready to flow in. And let us make the prayer of the Apostle our own, until all is ours. Until we know something more of "the fulness of the blessing of Christ": "Filled with all joy and peace in believing"; "Full of power by the Spirit of God."

O that these few words might create a desire in every heart that Christ would come and dwell there. God first of all creates the desire and then satisfies it. And the very prayer the Apostle prayed is ready to be answered in your case. Pray to be strengthened by God's Spirit: pray that Christ may dwell within—His constant presence be known; pray that you may come to know how much you are loved, and to apprehend what love has prepared for those who have learned to love; pray that you may be filled. It is because we just come short of this we so often fail.

## THE POT OF OIL

**F**OR all who wish to know the will of God and the true secret of success, also what our real resource is in a time of weakness, there will be found some very important instruction in the incident of the woman and the pot of oil, with which the fourth chapter of 2 Kings opens.

We are living in days when very little of the power of God is known, and, consequently, questionable means are used to supply the lack of it. There is an appeal to the senses, and an effort to please, which leaves the soul barren. The shallowness and superficiality that abound are due to this cause as much as to any other.

The need of this woman, we read of, was great, for she was bereft of her natural support, her husband being dead, and she knew not where to look to meet the demands of her creditors. Moreover, her two sons were in danger of being taken from her. In this extremity she cries unto Elisha, and he asks her a question. The question he asks is, "What hast thou in the house?" and this is the answer he receives, "Thine handmaid hath not anything in the house *save a pot of oil.*"

The answer is significant, because the prophet virtually adds, "That is all that is required. If you have that, it is enough. The whole situation can be met." God's principle of working is to bring life out of death. The widow's natural source of supply had dried up—her husband was dead.

The majority of those who read these lines will not need to be told that the pot of oil has a spiritual significance, and consequently there is a deep lesson underlying it. In Scripture, oil is frequently used as a symbol

of the Holy Spirit. It was used in anointing both kings and priests as well as prophets. We read in Exodus xxx. of the composition of a holy anointing oil. The Tabernacle and all its vessels were to be anointed with it. It sanctified all that it touched, and God gave special instructions with reference to it: "Upon man's flesh shall it not be poured, neither shall ye make any other like it." Nor was it to be put upon a stranger.

It may be taken also as symbolical of the grace of God. The two are very closely connected. All grace is in the Holy Spirit. Our Lord, speaking of prayer, said "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke xi. 13. "Holy Spirit" here equivalent to "good things" in Matthew.) In connection with the man by the roadside, as recorded in Luke x., and the ministry of the Good Samaritan, we are told that he poured in "Oil and wine." Here we have the grace that enables us to "joy in God" (Rom. v.).

This pot of oil, then, is of deep significance. It was the use of it which proved sufficient to meet the dire necessities of the widow woman. The lesson is, that the Holy Spirit is our one great resource. The grace of God is sufficient.

But it is equally important to notice the method to be employed. The prophet's instructions are, "Go borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels: borrow not a few." The vessels must be *empty*. Oil does not mix; and nothing must accompany it. Further, the instructions were, "When thou art come in, *thou shalt shut the door* upon thee and upon thy sons." This, we are told, she did. Although she was to borrow the vessels from her neighbours, she was not told to invite her neighbours in to witness the miraculous increase of the oil. Nothing spectacular was to be allowed. We are told distinctly that before she poured out the oil, she shut the door upon her and her sons, as if this was of the utmost importance, and the

oil lasted as long as there was a vessel to fill. When there were no more vessels the oil stayed—"According to your faith be it unto you."

Are we not in danger of forgetting, even if we have not already forgotten, the lessons which the above incident suggests? The "pot of oil," even if possessed, is not considered sufficient, and all sorts of devices are employed, and means relied upon, to win people, or to create an interest. From the way it is being brought into use to-day, we might suppose the camera to be a *means of grace*. Others again, seem to think that any sort of phraseology will do as long as it attracts attention. The way the Lord's servants are advertised sometimes brings a blush of shame to the face. How carnal it all is! For in reality, although the intention may be right, and all may be done with a laudable purpose, it is only an appeal to the senses, which often leaves heart and conscience untouched. We do not believe in being dull, but it is not necessary to become a clown in order not to be dull.

Many seem to think that beside the "pot of oil," numerous adjuncts and helps are necessary, as if the Holy Spirit needed some assistance. The lesson of the empty vessels is forgotten. Never was there such a day for expedients and contrivances of every kind, and never was natural energy and activity of every description more in evidence. So much so, that if these possessed the importance some ascribe to them, we ought to be witnessing one of the mightiest revivals the world has ever seen. Instead of which, the very opposite is the case. The one thing needful seems often overlooked.

The fact is, the revivals of the past were characterized by something quite different from present-day tactics. At the Reformation—not to go further back—in the time of the great Methodist Revival—using that word Methodist in its original sense, and in the Revival more or less world-wide of 1859-60 (the last really great revival), much that is characteristic of to-day was almost entirely absent, but "the pot of oil" was not absent.



It may be asked, does not the Holy Spirit use means ? Yes, but what means ? In Scripture there is a complete absence of any reference to things which are deemed essential to-day. It may be said they did not exist. But certain things of a similar nature did exist. They are not found associated with our Lord's ministry or that of His apostles. All that the Lord mentions in connection with His ministry is, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." He had "the pot of oil," and is it not significant that in sending forth the earliest preachers of the Gospel, the *one and only* thing He mentions is that they were to "wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts i. 4). No other qualification seemed to be necessary. It will be said, times have changed. The answer to this is two-fold. First, we question whether *essentially* there is as much difference in people, between now and then, as is sometimes supposed. The most fundamental and clamant needs of man remain pretty much the same. Second, these needs can only be met in the same way. There is no change in this respect any more than in the other. Apart from the Holy Spirit's work, nothing vital can be effected, and thank God, He has not changed, nor has His power waned. The "pot of oil" is still sufficient to meet all demands if we know how to use it. If there are empty vessels waiting to be filled, He can still fill them.

That the Holy Spirit does use means we do not question. He uses hymns, which are human compositions. He condescends to employ other means. But to-day the human element has become exaggerated ; the human devices to attract and please are far too much in evidence, and too much relied upon. Such methods in the end defeat themselves. The more people become accustomed to this kind of thing, the more the craving for it grows. Young people especially are becoming more or less doped. This is why we call attention to the lesson conveyed in "the pot of oil."

Does not the incident recorded in Acts xvi. throw

much light on this very point? A certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination followed Paul and Silas, and we are told that she cried, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation." What objection could there be to this? What publicity it gave! What a splendid advertisement! Was this how the Apostle regarded it? Far otherwise. We read that Paul was *grieved*, and in due course he promptly put an end to it: and why? Because the Holy Spirit was grieved. He would not receive aid from such a source, even though it all sounded plausible enough. It is the lesson of the shut door, "And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons." It might have been objected to this: "Oh! let the neighbours see the miraculous increase of the oil! What good it will do them and what glory it will bring to God!" But this is seldom God's way. The grace and power of the Holy Spirit are increased by secret communion.

Then again, the world may seek to help in Gospel work and kill it in doing so, because the Holy Spirit will not receive such help. If it be said that in the instance just quoted, the source was Satanic, this may be equally true of other methods which, on the surface, seem to bear no trace of their origin. Satan cares not by what means he can compromise the truth, or neutralize the power and effect of the preaching.

If it be said, that in those early days they could work miracles to attract attention, the reply is, those miracles were wrought in the power of the Holy Ghost. The adventitious aids to-day are not in the power of the Holy Ghost; and further, if He has seen fit for miracles to cease, are we to try to put something else in the place of miracles which He does not countenance?

There is another matter of serious importance closely connected with our subject. So far, we have referred to Gospel preaching and its allied activities in relation to the world; but the truth relating to the "pot of

oil" has a bearing upon other matters. We refer to ministry amongst the Lord's people. Danger arises in this respect in two opposite directions in the present day. One is with regard to those who take advantage of liberty afforded by what is called the "Open" meeting, to occupy time with unprofitable ministry, and to the utter weariness of those present. Such offenders are without the "pot of oil." The other danger which threatens, proceeds from the opposite quarter. It is the danger of refusing ministry, because of a "closed" platform, and thus doing what Scripture forbids, namely, *Quenching the Spirit* and despising prophesyings.

There is much to-day to humble us, and cause us to seek the face of the Lord in prayer and confession. Declension and departure are only too evident in certain directions, and, though this may take different forms, the reality of it can scarcely be questioned. Principles once valued are being let go. We have to remember it is not what people want, but what they *need*. Surely those in responsibility ought to know what it is they *need*, and if they possess the "pot of oil" they will be able to give it to them. What they *want*, may be, merely to be pleased. Such desires may not spring from the renewed nature at all.

In every way, we need to-day the lesson of the "pot of oil." The question for each one of us, as for that woman, is "What hast thou in the house?" If "the pot of oil" is there, it will prove enough. If it is not, nothing else can take its place. If we know what it means to "shut the door" and for the oil to be available, and to be increased by prayer and waiting upon God, we shall find there is sufficient both for ourselves and for others. The oil is increased in secret and by use. The more she poured, the more the oil responded. Thus all claims were met, and she and her family lived upon the rest. May God give us to have "the pot of oil" and to know how to use it, and may we not miss the significance of the shut door. How blessed to be able to meet all demands and have enough to live upon!

## DIVINE GUIDANCE

**D**IVINE guidance is a great reality, and is, more or less, the experience of every true child of God. According to those words of the Apostle Paul, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God." And, again, we have the promise: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with Mine eye" (Ps. xxxii. 8).

We wish to say a little on this subject, not only because its importance demands it, but because unusual prominence has been given to the subject of late in certain quarters; and lastly, we are led to refer to it on account of some personal experiences, which may not be without interest and value.

### I

We have said that Divine guidance is the experience of every child of God, and this is borne out by the historical reminiscences given us of God's people in the Scriptures, where we have some very striking instances of it. But before dwelling upon this, let us say a word about "guidance" as associated with what is known as the *Oxford Group Movement*.

One very prominent feature of this Movement is the *quiet hour* which all who belong to it are advised to spend at the beginning of each day; during which the mind is to be relaxed, the will subdued, so that guidance may be received, not only in matters of great and pressing importance wherein special wisdom is required, but in the ordinary details of life. This does not mean merely asking for help in the "common round and trivial task,"

which is always necessary, but asking where to go and what to do each day.

It is surely obvious that with the majority of ordinary people there are duties devolving upon them which *must* be done, and which no one else can do for them. And moreover in such things they have not to ascertain God's will. If a young man has a post in the city, where he is paid a salary to do certain work, and his employer expects to see him, and it is his bounden duty to be, in his place day by day, it would be superfluous, or something worse, for him to ask God each morning if he is to go. There might be reasons why he should ask whether he is to seek some other employment, but while he is paid to do certain work he is bound to do it, unless prevented by something beyond his own control. The same applies to a young wife and mother. Except under special circumstances, there is no need to ask if it is the Divine will for her to bath her baby, or cook her husband's dinner, or attend to the duties of the home. And even though some of these can be performed by servants, still there are obvious duties for every wife and mother which must not be neglected.

There are others whose time is much more at their own disposal, but even these have certain regular duties which they cannot with impunity evade. It is clear therefore that asking for guidance must be confined—except in unusual cases—to matters which lie outside the ordinary tenor of their life, and have to do more particularly with God's service.

It is necessary to say this, because there have been cases, according to all accounts, where people who have given themselves up to the *quiet hour* have supposed that they have been directed to neglect known duties for imaginary ones. And here we would like to say that while a *quiet hour* is in itself greatly to be prized, and secured at any cost, if at all practicable, and the gain is immense, yet all depends upon the character of that *quiet hour*, and what we do with it. Above all things it is necessary to get into touch with God through prayer and

reading the Bible, and not be waiting with vacant mind and relaxed will for any voice that may be heard. Such an attitude borders on Spiritism, and is particularly dangerous for the young and inexperienced, and for any who do not know their Bibles ; as it lays such open to misdirection of the most subtle kind. There is the spirit of anti-Christ as well as the Spirit of God, and the spirit of *error* as well as of *truth* (1 John iv. 1-3, 6). And our own inward impulse and desire may easily be mistaken for the voice of God.

There is therefore a very dangerous side to what is called the "quiet hour," as it is now being practised. Even the most experienced cannot all at once distinguish between the voice of God and what is simply the prompting of their own mind or imagination. It is possible, of course, to receive direction from God in a moment. Indeed, the first intimation of His will often comes instantaneously, but *we* cannot always tell *at the moment* whether it is the voice of God. There is such a thing as our own impulse in addition to the other agencies of a Satanic nature, and we are liable to be seriously misled, and to do things which will fill us with lifelong regret, if we do things under the mistaken notion that we are acting under Divine guidance, when it is not so.

In the following remarks we hope to indicate how we may distinguish between that which springs from ourselves, or from some evil agency, and what it really means to be led by the Spirit of God. In other words, our subject is the nature of Divine guidance.

## II

In considering this subject we may be helped by a few illustrations drawn from Scripture. Perhaps one of the most remarkable in this connection is found in the twenty-fourth chapter of Genesis. Here we have the record of Abraham sending his servant to seek a bride for Isaac. There is, first of all, Abraham's purpose, and the definite instructions to Eliezer, accompanied by the assurance : "The Lord God of heaven . . . shall send

His angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence" (v. 7).

But although the servant received this assurance, this does not make him either careless or self-confident, and his conduct is well worthy of careful consideration. On arriving at the city of Nahor, whither he was bound, the first thing he does is to give himself to *prayer*. See verses 10-14.

The first, and perhaps the greatest, lesson we have to learn in regard to our spiritual life, is the place which prayer has in all matters as between God and ourselves. It is safe to assert that nothing of any moment has ever been accomplished, on the spiritual side, apart from prayer. All men of God, all the great figures in the *spiritual* history of mankind, have all been men of prayer. And it is certain that prayer has its place in Divine guidance. God's purpose does not render unnecessary our prayer. The servant, in the story we are considering, had been fully assured of Abraham's purpose (which was really God's purpose), and, moreover, the promise had been given that God would send his angel before him, yet the first thing the servant does is to pray. "O Lord God of my master Abraham," he says, "I pray Thee, send me good speed this day."

Thus we learn that if Divine guidance is to be ours, it will be vouchsafed in answer to prayer. Our prayers and God's purposes work together. There is in all these matters the human side as well as the Divine. God, so to speak, collaborates with His children. He acts in answer to their prayers. On the other hand, our prayers can accomplish nothing if outside, or contrary to, His purpose. "If we ask anything according to *His will*, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him" (1 John v. 14-15).

We must never give way to fatalism, on the one hand, or to carelessness and indifference, on the other. That is to say, we must never say, "If God intends such a thing to be done, it will be done, and I need trouble no more

about it " ; or think to ourselves that we have no part to play. Ezekiel xxxvi. contains very definite instruction as to this. In that chapter, God makes most lavish promises to Israel ; but he concludes by saying, " I will yet for this *be inquired of by the house of Israel*, to do it for them " (v. 37). God treats us neither as stones nor machines, but as intelligent and *responsible* creatures, and, moreover, He wishes us to be fully interested and of one mind with Him in what He is doing. But the servant not only prays, he asks God to act *providentially*. In other words, he requests that *events* and circumstances might afford him direction as to a right decision. He prays as follows :

" Let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink ; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also ; let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac " (v. 14).

It is to be noticed that the servant is not content with some inward intuition, nor does he confine his prayer merely to the request that the right one may be found, but definitely asks for outward indications. And God answers exactly along these lines. When Rebekah comes she offers to draw water for the camels also. There is what we may call the providential dealings of God.

But there is still a further action on the part of the servant, it is well to notice. He does not act impulsively, but takes time for deliberation.

" And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not."

So far, then, as this narrative is concerned, four points have come before us in relation to Divine guidance. 1. Purpose ; 2. Prayer ; 3. Providence ; 4. Patience.

In their application to ourselves we learn : (a) In seeking guidance, our first concern must be to ascertain God's purpose. Our subject is Divine Guidance, and we cannot expect God to guide if our purpose is entirely



contrary to His. It is presumed that if we seek His guidance we shall also seek to know His will, and that our chief concern is not to please ourselves but to please Him. There is, no doubt, the general superintendence of Divine Providence, which takes effect even where people may be ignorant of God, and without any special desire that their lives should be ordered according to His will. But that is outside the scope of our subject. The question before us is, How are we to ascertain the knowledge of His purpose and give effect to it? How am I to know whether God will have me do this or that, or go here or there, or make a certain choice? The first step is to ascertain His purpose.

But it will be asked, How are we to find out what His purpose is? How is this arrived at? The answer is, generally through some inward impression or desire. A thought seems to take possession of us and abide with us. Such impression may come to us in various ways. It may come at a meeting; or through another's influence, or a text of Scripture may be impressed upon us; or we may fancy we hear a voice, or it may come through some event, or may be born in silent communion with God. But we have to find out whether we are merely being swayed by our own feelings and desires or whether it is God's will and plan for us.

It is not enough to have an impression, for all sorts of impressions may come, which are not indicative of God's will for us at all; they are merely our own feelings and proclivities. We should be specially careful with regard to the influence of others. It is not their will which matters, but God's. And this brings us to our next point: (b) PRAYER. And here it is necessary to remind ourselves that the incidents of Genesis xxiv. can only be used to furnish principles. We must not be disappointed if in our own case we do not ascertain God's will as clearly and distinctly and definitely and all at once, as was the case with Eliezer. If the impression comes to us and abides with us we need to give ourselves to prayer before taking any action whatever. It is in

waiting upon God that the impression will either deepen or fade away.

(c) But even if the impression does deepen, so liable are we to be mistaken in this respect—for our own feelings and wishes are liable to become mixed with it and even to inspire it—there is the third point we noticed : namely, God's *providential dealings*. This, of course, may take various forms—forms too numerous to mention here. But by circumstances of one kind or another a door is opened or hindrances are removed, or something happens, which we realize is in distinct relation with those inward exercises through which we have been passing. This, as we have seen, was the case with Eliezer.

(d) It is then, as in his case, we shall pause—filled with wonder, perhaps, as he was—until we feel no doubt whatever as to what God's will is. A door stands open before us.

Going back now to what was said at the beginning with reference to guidance, do we not see in the light of all this, that real guidance is far from what it is sometimes supposed to be, and does not mean acting upon any impression or impulse that seems to come. There are cases, of course, where guidance may come instantaneously because of the necessity of the case ; and one whose whole time is devoted to the Lord's work would seek guidance each day, yet even in such a case, as a general rule, his work would be carried on in certain grooves and on well defined lines. The question is, are we called upon to expect guidance, through hearing a voice, or receiving some impression, with regard to matters which lie outside our ordinary duties, responsibilities and engagements when these claim our attention. We conceive that such a supposition is fraught with the gravest danger. But we may always pray for help and guidance *within* the sphere of our appointed and recognized activities.

So far we have considered the matter more with regard to matters of great moment, and which may to a large extent change the whole aspect and course of our life.

But we often seek for guidance in matters less critical and of smaller range. Nor do we mean to suggest that matters of this class are of little importance. It is of the utmost importance to seek guidance as to our movements and undertakings.

The question arises, Can we always know? Can we invariably expect to know for certain what is the will of God in a certain matter? or do we at times have to trust that God will overrule, and that He is guiding, though we do not at the time exactly know the way?

There is the instance of Elisha as recorded in 2 Kings iv. The woman has come to him on account of the death of her son, and Elisha confesses: "The Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." Elisha was totally unprepared for what happened, but there can be no doubt he was divinely guided in all that followed. Of course, this illustration does not cover every case. Sometimes a difference of judgment may arise, even when all concerned are desirous that the will of the Lord should be done. Paul would not be persuaded not to go up to Jerusalem, and when all attempts at persuasion seemed unavailing, all that could be said was: "The will of the Lord be done."

Cases differ, and circumstances differ. Sometimes if we are not clear and seem to lack direction, the wisest plan is to wait, and not take a leap in the dark. At other times, if we don't know of any reason why we should *not* act, and circumstances seem to force us to some line of action, or, it may be, pressure is being brought by others, then the only thing to do is to commit our way unto the Lord and trust Him. Always remembering that God has given us intelligence and the ability in some measure to form a judgment, and we are responsible to exercise these gifts. But apart from what has already been said, in our remarks upon Genesis xxiv. there is no hard and fast rule, nor any mere mechanical process by which we can infallibly ascertain the mind of the Lord. There is, as we have indicated, our individual responsibility, and we are left sometimes in dependence upon

God, to exercise the faculties of which He has already placed us in possession.

Some personal references may perhaps fittingly close our remarks upon this great subject. For it will be expected that anyone who attempts to express views on such a matter and seeks to help others, will, at least, have had some experience of the way himself.

And first, we would say, without any hesitation or equivocation, we believe entirely and absolutely in Divine guidance. We believe that God directs His children in the way they have to take. He can communicate to their minds His thoughts, His purposes, His plans. And that He does so, the writer has not the smallest question. From His side, there cannot be a doubt that our whole life is planned, though not in any determined and fatalistic way, leaving us without any say in the matter, or responsibility. We cannot say where and how these two sides fit one another, or determine the measure of each, but that both exist is certain. In Ephesians ii. 10 we read : " For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, *which God hath before ordained* that we should walk in them." And again, " The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and he delighteth in his way." The first passage may be taken as meaning that in a general way Christians are foreordained unto good works, but nevertheless the words, " we are His workmanship " seem to imply that God prepares and fits us with something definite in view : that He has a plan for each life : and this seems confirmed by Hebrews xiii. 21 : " Make you perfect in every good work *to do His will.*" That while all believers are called to good works in general, yet, God's will is not the same for all, and each has to discover the particular good work God wills for him to do ; and the emphasis in the last passage is to be laid on " to do His will." For instance, some are undoubtedly called to go out to the foreign mission field. But every believer does not receive this call. It is not God's will for everyone, even though a good work in itself. Nor is it going too

far to say that where it is not God's will it ceases to be a good work as far as that individual is concerned. Even the death and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ would not have been a good work unless it had been the will of God. And that is why His whole mission is summed up in the words, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God."

How important, then, Divine guidance becomes in the light of these considerations. It is not sufficient to say, "This is a good work, I will devote my time to it." But our aim must be to discover what is the particular work God would have each of us do.

In regard to the general subject of guidance, our own experience is that where God is guiding He gives *light*. It is not easy perhaps to convey to another all that is meant by this, nor is it altogether easy to describe. There is a sense of light, and all becomes clear. Though not necessarily as to details. But you have the sense of being directed. You move towards a definite goal. It is well described by one in the words of a hymn :

"Light Divine surrounds thy going  
God Himself shall mark thy way."

Whereas those other words, so well known, do not express quite the same assurance :

"Lead kindly light *amid the encircling gloom*,  
Lead Thou me on ;  
The night is dark and I am far from home,  
Lead Thou me on."

This is rather a prayer for guidance, than the sense of guidance. And it is not a little remarkable that the writer of the first lines was led into ever clearer light and fuller knowledge of the truth, while the other never seemed to reach the full certainty for which he craved.

With regard to the servant of the Lord as to the matter of places to visit or subjects to speak from the same remark applies. Well-known verses and well-known chapters may seem, for the moment, dumb. There is no light. Alas ! for ourselves and our audience if under

such circumstances we seek to force ourselves. When light is given all uncertainty goes. The subject becomes illuminated, and we go forward with confidence, treading with firm footstep. So, often, with regard to places to visit.<sup>1</sup> It is sometimes asserted that in order to be divinely guided we must have a text of Scripture. No doubt God does often guide by this means, but it is not, we think, an infallible and unalterable rule. Indeed it would be very easy to be misled in this way. Our own experience does not confirm such a rule. We have to learn what God's mind is in communion with Him, and we become possessed of an inward impression which is born of being in His presence. After that, confirmation and encouragement often come to us from passages of Scripture. In the greatest crisis of our life an inward impression will come to us in communion with God. And if we are right as to this, there will be given with it a deep sense of the need of prayer. And eventually God will be seen at work in His providential way, and eventually we shall stand in the presence of the opened door, and we have only to enter in.

Recently we had a remarkable experience along these lines in regard to visiting a certain country. Such a project was quite outside our own ideas and plans. We did not of ourselves entertain any such notion. Nor was it some text of Scripture that suggested it ; nor was it suggested by others. The inward impression came. That is all we can say. So unlikely, however, did it seem of realization that, at first, it was scarcely entertained. But it remained, and eventually became the subject of earnest prayer, and, without entering into details, after a month or two we found ourselves crossing the channel, definitely committed to the enterprise. Each further step only confirmed the fact that we were being Divinely guided, and the next three months were

<sup>1</sup> There are some remarkable instances of guidance in this respect in the late Charles Stanley's deeply interesting book, *The Way the Lord hath Led Me*, Geo. Morrish, 20 Paternoster Square, E.C.4.

filled with a unique experience of God's guidance and blessing.

And this leads us back to where we started, namely to Genesis xxiv.—purpose, prayer, providence and patience. First the sense of purpose, and our own wills brought into harmony with it : then constant prayer for the fulfilment of it. And how long this process may continue depends upon the will of God and the way He chooses to work. Then, having worked within us, He works in outward ways ; and lastly, we reach a point where we just stand and wait.

Surely no experience can be sweeter or more satisfying than to see God accomplishing His end in us and through us. To be able to say at the end of the days, " Right was the pathway leading to this."

" Through waves, through clouds, through storms  
God gently clears the way,  
We wait His time, so shall the night  
Soon end in blissful day.

He everywhere hath sway  
And all things serve His might,  
His every act pure blessing is,  
His path unsullied light.

When He makes bare His arm  
Who shall His work withstand ?  
When He His people's cause defends  
Who then can stay His hand ?

We comprehend Him not,  
Yet earth and heaven tell  
God sits as sovereign on the throne  
And ruleth all things well."

Let it be said in conclusion, that those who seek Divine guidance find the experience becomes ever more real and more wonderful. May reader and writer be ever willing to suffer their lives to be ordered according to the will of God.

## A MEDITATION ON JOHN XVII

VERSES 1-3 may be taken together, they form a sort of introduction.

1. The Son asks to be glorified that He may glorify the Father.

2. To this end the Father has given Him power over all flesh—He is Lord. (Cf. Luke x. 19-22.)

3. The particular way in which the power of Christ is to be manifested, and the Father glorified, spoken of here, is by giving eternal life to as many as have been given Him.

(All here has to do with the relationship of the Father and the Son. The Son glorifies the Father, the Father gives power to the Son. Those to whom eternal life is given are given to Him by the Father. And eternal life is in knowing God the Father and His sent one Jesus Christ.)

Notice a distinction between "*Father glorify Thy Son*" (v. 1), and "the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent" (v. 3). Here we have a distinction which constantly appears throughout the prayer. That is, on the one hand, we have the eternal relationship that ever subsisted between the Father and the Son; and, on the other, the Mediatorial relationship which has been taken, and belongs to Christ. The first was never taken, it always subsisted. And it is to be noted that in this connection it is simply "Father, glorify Thy Son," and the only reason given is "That Thy Son also may glorify Thee." We have one Divine Person addressing another on terms of perfect equality. Who but the Son could say, "Glorify thou Me," and for the reason given? He undertakes to glorify the Father.



The mediatorial position is connected with the pleasure of the Father and what the Son does as Man to accomplish the Father's will. And this is the aspect presented when it is a question of giving eternal life. "As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh."

This is enlarged upon in verse 4. As Man, Christ had glorified God on earth and finished the work which the Father had given Him to do. All rests upon this (as to eternal life) and all is connected with Manhood.

But immediately, in verse 5, we again touch the other side. This verse speaks of a condition and relationship which ever subsisted. The words "glorify Thou Me with Thine Own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was," speak of what existed in eternity as between the Father and the Son. It is just this which some to-day seem to have lost sight of. Yet even here it is not One Who is God speaking independently, nor is it merely God speaking to God. Had it been so, there would have been no need to have said "Glorify Thou Me." He could have gone back to that glory independently, of His own accord. The Deity has recently been spoken of (it had become necessary in order to defend a certain doctrine) as if the Godhead consisted of three independent Persons—each God. But the verse we are considering reveals something altogether different from this. Here we have one Person addressing another as Father, and *asking* to be glorified with the glory which He had with that One before the world was. This verse sets forth precisely the opposite of what is being taught. We have three important statements in this verse.

1. Glorify Thou Me *with Thine own self*.
2. With the glory which I had *with Thee*.
3. Before the world was.

Here it is not an *independent* existence which we are called to contemplate. The One addressed is spoken of as Father! The glory spoken of is a glory that was shared. And the condition referred to always existed—"before the world was."

Here, then, we have the truth of the Trinity so far as regards the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son subsisting together in eternal relationship. "Thine own self"; "with Thee"; "before the world was" are expressions which explain this as plainly as any human words could express it. Unless we grasp this we have no true idea of God, as God, at all; either in regard to unity or Trinity.

The first five verses then bring to our notice two distinct revelations. One that of an eternal relationship between the One speaking and the One addressed; the other, a relationship which began in time, as the result of Incarnation, and proceeding from the fact, that the Father sent the Son, and that the Father was the source of His words and works. As verse 7 expresses it "*Now they have known that all things whatsoever Thou hast given Me are of Thee.*" Although these revelations can be distinguished, they cannot be separated. For even in relation to eternity the Father is regarded as the source of all. The Son possesses everything in relation to the Father, but not separately and independently of the Father. Any contrary suggestion would carry a wrong thought. The expressions in verse 5 "with Thine own self" and "with Thee" tell us so. Christ does not return to the glory He ever had as God in any sense independently or of Himself, so to speak. What inconceivable grandeur, then, attaches to the opening verses of this prayer! and the One Who speaks, how inconceivably great! In the full confidence of relationship He says "Father"; and with equal confidence and certainty He can speak of power being given to Him "over all flesh." Moreover He can impart eternal life to all the Father gives Him. Yet the One Who speaks is Man as well as God. Adam, the first man, never had "eternal life," and he lost the life he did possess. We inherited death from him, not life. "So death passed upon all men." But this One Who speaks of *giving eternal life* can also say, "I have glorified Thee on the earth." Not "I have

tried to do My best " nor " I have made a supreme effort to glorify Thee," nor even " I have succeeded in some measure," but, I *have* glorified Thee. And the words which follow are equally explicit. " I have *finished* the work which Thou gavest Me to do." Here, again, there is no qualification. It is not " I did all I could, but did not quite complete it." There is no asking for forbearance or consideration, much less forgiveness on account of shortcoming or failure. No. " I have glorified Thee on the earth : I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." All that is asked for rests upon this ; and anything short of this would have made the remainder of the prayer impossible.

It is well to notice, too, that the supreme blessing to be bestowed is " eternal life." This is, of course, infinitely more than perpetuity of existence. It is a special character of life. It is to know the Father and Jesus Christ His sent One. Christ Himself was the Word of life—He expressed it, " He is the true God and eternal life." But there are three words that occur throughout the prayer which are worthy of attention in this connection. They are " glory," " joy " and " love." The first and last occur frequently. These characterize the eternal life which is ours.

" Glory." When our Lord asks to be glorified, He cannot *ask* anything higher. When He further says, " The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them ", He cannot *give* anything more. And when at the close He expresses the desire, " 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," He cannot *desire* anything beyond. Eternal life will find its home and surroundings and conditions in *glory*.

" Joy." In verse 13 our Lord makes request for His disciples that " they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves." His joy was in doing the Father's will, and knowing the Father's love, and speaking the Father's

words. We are to taste that joy now, and it will be our portion for ever, in the sense that the Father will be the source of our joy for ever.

"Love." The prayer closes on this note. But as we shall have more to say upon this subject when we come to the latter part of the prayer, we need not dwell upon it now; except to say that love completes and fulfils the other two.

Verse 6 tells us how the mission of Christ to this world was wholly and entirely for the Father's pleasure and to glorify Him. Other passages in John tell us this with equal plainness (John iv. 34; vi. 38; vii. 16; x. 18). This verse informs us that the supreme thing was the manifestation of the Father's Name. Also, that those to whom that Name was manifested were given to Christ by the Father. Our Lord says, "Thine they were and Thou gavest them Me." And of them it is added "They have kept Thy word." The Father's word had reached them through Christ, and had been received. Thus the Father was revealed to men. The Son alone had known Him, but now that knowledge is shared by others. As the Lord said on another occasion: "No one knoweth Who the Son is, but the Father; and Who the Father is, but the Son, *and he to whom the Son will reveal Him*" (Luke x. 22). The Son in His eternal relationship to the Father is unknown; nor is it the subject of revelation, but the Son in becoming Man, while not disclosing the mystery of His being, brings the knowledge of the Father to those who are given to Him. Could anything be more blessed? In becoming Man He still retains all that was His eternally as the Son. But in the condition of manhood, He shares with us all that blessed knowledge of the Father, as sons with Him, sharing His position, and loved with the same love. And verse 7 tells us that all that the disciples saw in their Lord and Master was but a revelation of the Father. His grace—His words and actions—were so many inlets into the Father's heart, and told them of the Father and of the love He had to

them. Christ reveals the Father to us, and this is eternal life.

The Father was speaking to them. Thus verse 8. "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." Thus they knew the place Christ had, and what their own place in Him was. If Christ was the sent One of the Father, this told of what they were to the Father and their own place before the Father. How blessed to think it was the Son Himself Who was now speaking about them to the Father! Eternal life is characterized by this intimacy. As the same writer expresses it in chapter i of his first epistle: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." The Father has given us to the Son, and the Son reveals the Father, and now prays to the Father about those to whom He has given eternal life. How completely our life is bound up with the Father and the Son!

As we have said, the perfect oneness of the Father and the Son stands out in this prayer, and never more so than in verse 10. The Lord, as verse 9 reveals, is concerned here only with those given Him by the Father. He did not make any demands at this time for the world. One day He will ask for the world and receive it, according to what is written in Psalm ii., "Ask of Me and I will give Thee the heathen for thine inheritance," but here His thoughts are limited to "them which Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine." He is concerned about the Father's interests. He is absolutely one with the Father in every interest of the Father's. And this is never more clearly expressed than in the words of verse 10, "And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine, and I am glorified in them." These words enshrine a most precious truth in relation to the Trinity. Nothing that the Father has but what belongs to the Son, and nothing the Son has but what He received from the Father. "'All Mine are Thine,'

for I have received all from Thee ; and ' all Thine are Mine,' for I share everything with Thee."

" And I am glorified in them." How wonderful to think that this relationship between the Father and the Son—this eternal relationship—is spoken of here (it is one main theme of the prayer) in relation to the disciples. It is not something entirely abstract and apart. We have a place in these petitions, yea, we are the subject of them. Yet all is bound up with what is involved in that which subsists between the Father and the Son. The Father, and the Son, and ourselves. How amazing !

Yet the Son has His own destined place, as the next verse tells us. " I come to Thee," He says. And the Son asks the Father to keep through His Own Name those Who had been given Him, " That they may be one as we are." Could any statement fill us with greater wonder than that the Son should request that these disciples should be kept in the Father's own Name in order that they might be characterized by the same oneness as subsisted between the Father and the Son ? Again this perfect oneness between the Father and the Son becomes prominent, and we see that this oneness extends even to their purpose in regard to the Apostles. No doubt the Apostles, as to their purpose and aims, were one with the Father and the Son. For it is important to remember that this part of the prayer is confined entirely to the Apostles.

In verse 12 we see that Christ had kept them, not in His own Name, but the Father's. And, incidentally, we have in this verse one of the most marvellous references to Scripture that could possibly be given. All the Apostles had been kept but one. That one was Judas. And Judas had been spoken of in Scripture, though not by name. We should carefully notice this omission. Neither in Scripture, nor by our Lord, at any time, or on any occasion (except in the garden when he takes the place of traitor publicly), is Judas mentioned by name, no, not even in the upper room.

In John xiii. 18 we find our Lord quoting the Scripture that referred to the betrayal, "He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me," but there is no reference to Judas by name. Thus the particular man Judas was not compelled by some irrevocable decree to perpetrate this deed. It was foretold that someone would do it ; but as far as Judas himself was concerned he was a free agent. This involves God's foreknowledge and human responsibility, and we may not be able to draw a line between the two, or see clearly how to distinguish between them, but that both are recognized and both exist, not only in Scripture, but in practical everyday life, is a fact which cannot be disputed.

But let us rather dwell upon what our Lord says as to the Scripture, and note its unique place and character. "The Scripture must be fulfilled." On another occasion He said, "The Scripture cannot be broken." How can Scripture—the Bible—be anything else than the very Word of God ? for what word of man could ever have such importance, or ever be so completely verified ?

A little later we find the Lord saying, "Thy Word is truth." And, again, speaking of the Apostles, He refers to their word (*v.* 20). The fact is, there is no difference, as to inspiration and authority, between the Word spoken in Old Testament times, or by Our Lord, or by His inspired Apostles. For the simple reason that the Author of that word, in every case, was the Holy Ghost. The repeated statements of Scripture are absolutely decisive on this point. It was God's Word whether it came through the prophets, or apostles, or through the Son. And so in verse 14 we have the Lord saying, "I have given them Thy word."

He was leaving His disciples in the world. They were to take His place. In a special way they had fellowship with the Father and the Son. For in a peculiar sense they were vessels of the Spirit—instruments for carrying the Christian message to the world. And in this way they would be continuing the work

of Christ and have Christ's joy fulfilled in themselves (v. 13). The Apostles learned from Christ's word that He was the sent One of the Father, and had given them His word, and thus the very joy of the Son would be theirs in continuing the work.

But all this is apart from the world. We do well to take heed to the significance of the statement in verse 14. "The world hath hated them because they are not of the world even as *I am not of the world.*" How this has been forgotten. With the sad result that the power of testimony has been lost, and joy has declined.

In the succeeding verses the Lord again speaks as One on perfect equality with the Father. He prays that His Own may not be taken out of the world but kept from the evil. "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world." And the sanctification spoken of here is the effect of the truth upon them. It is sanctification *through* the truth. Not as in Hebrews x. where believers are set apart to God according to the efficacy of the work of Christ. Here it is not the *Work* but the *Word*. Sanctification through the truth. And then the Lord adds in v. 19 "And for their sakes I sanctify myself that they also might be truly sanctified." Christ where He is, is the measure of our sanctification. That glory is the place to which we belong, and where we are destined to be. And evidently in this verse the marginal rendering is correct—"truly sanctified." Christ in glory—a Man there—Man in the highest place, according to the thoughts and purposes of God—that is the measure of our sanctification, and the truth conforms us to that. We are not of the world even as Christ is not of it. We belong to the place where He is, and have our part with Him there.

How wondrous is this prayer! The Son in communion with the Father, and in communication with Him about those given to Him out of the world. We have more than mere human thoughts expressed here,



we have thoughts flowing from, and desires according to, the Father and the Son. It is no human level we occupy, however elevated, but a Divine level. All belongs to the Father, according to the Father's purposes of love, and yet the Son is glorified in those given Him by the Father. The prayer is on their behalf. "That they may be one even as we are one." Were we but near enough, and intimate enough—were we but sufficiently moved with wonder—how such a revelation would affect us! What mean or selfish thoughts, or indeed any feelings of self-interest, or self-esteem—could ever find a place in such an atmosphere or in the presence of such Persons! This High Priestly prayer on behalf of all His own should drive far from us the fleshly antagonisms so often rife among the people of God, and deliver us from all party spirit and sectarianism. We are called unto the fellowship of God's Son. May this so characterize us and occupy our minds that nothing inconsistent with it may ever be allowed.

We have, then, in this prayer, first of all, the Son's place with the Father, and in relation to the place He took and all He came to do; and then the Lord thinks of the men given Him out of the world; and the special place of testimony the Apostles were to fill. For this cause the Lord prays "that they may be one as we are." And then adds, "I have given them Thy word." They had believed through Christ's word; others were to believe through their word. It is only of the Apostles the Lord says: "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." We must not lose sight of the fact that the "men given Him out of the world" filled a place which no one else has ever filled. Apostolic succession, as usually meant, is a mere figment of the human brain. There were no successors of the Apostles. The Apostle Paul stands alone. He did not "believe through their word," but through direct revelation.

There is a section of the prayer, then, exclusively devoted to the Apostles, and another to those who

should believe through their word. That section begins with verse 20. The Lord prays that they may be one. First of all in order that the world may *believe*. This is a universal oneness—a manifest unity throughout the world. This was to have a most profound effect. Proving that it was intended to be manifest, for if unseen how could it have any effect? But in this respect the Church has grievously failed. It is in ruins. Manifest unity, according to the original idea, will never be witnessed again. The effect of the divisions and discords in the Church upon the world is deplorable and beyond remedy.

But the Lord not only speaks of the world *believing* but of the world *knowing*, and this will be true in a day yet future. The reference to this is prefaced by the words: "And the *glory* which Thou gavest Me I have given them"; and it is when the world will see us in the same glory with Christ that the world will *know* that "Christ and we are one," and that the Father sent Him, and that we are loved even as He is loved.

The Lord was leaving His disciples in the world, and He does not ask the Father to take them out of the world, but now He prays "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." The glory given Him by the Father, which we shall behold, is connected by our Lord with the love the Father ever had to Him. "Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world." It is impossible to separate between the love and the relationship. Impossible, and altogether unreasonable, to say the love is eternal but the relationship was only in time.

As we behold that glory we shall see how much He was ever loved. Loved when there was no other object to love; loved as no other ever was loved. Yet, amazing thought! we share it. For it is when the world sees us in glory with Him it will know the truth

of these words, "And hast loved them, as thou hast loved Me." So that the more we know of the Father's love to Him, the more we shall grasp the thought of His love to us. And thus, as we behold His glory, which tells us of the Father's love to Him, it will be a proof and token to us of the love which is ours in Him. Beholding His glory will make us conscious of our own blessing.

Left in the world now to witness for Him—not of the world even as He is not of it—we shall one day be with Him where He is to behold His glory. In the meantime believers possess a knowledge of the Father not enjoyed by 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."

Here, be it noted, the Lord speaks not only of having declared the Father's Name, but adds, "and will declare it." And no doubt it was in fulfilment of this He said to Mary after His resurrection, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father ; and to My God and your God." And, again, in Hebrews ii. we read : "I will declare Thy Name unto my brethren, in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee" (v. 12). And this in order that, according to His desire expressed in the closing words of His prayer, the love may be *in* us. It is not merely love as a *fact*, blessed as that is, but love *felt*. Not merely love *toward* us but love *in* us. And this is the work of the Holy Spirit. Of this, no doubt, the Lord is thinking when He speaks of still declaring the Father's Name. He does it by the continuous ministry of the Spirit. Thus the Apostle Paul can write (indicating such ministry ; though from his own point of view, as John does from his) : "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." And again,

"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

But the Lord closes His prayer with three most significant words. Why should He ask, not only that the love may be in them, but add, "and I in them"? Is not the significance of this often overlooked? The importance attaching to these words is, if the love is to be in us and enjoyed by us, *Christ must have His right place in our hearts*. Not only is the love inseparable from Him, but only as we give Christ His true place can it be consciously enjoyed. The more He becomes to us the better the love will be known. For how could we even think the Father would manifest His love to one who did not rightly appreciate His beloved Son? But, on the other hand, the fact that Christ is in us is an additional reason for the Father's love. If He sees in us the One He loves best, and sees that that One is loved by us, there will be nothing to interfere with His pleasure in us, or interrupt the outflow of that love here spoken of.

The whole of this wonderful prayer is summed up in these closing words: "I have known Thee." That assures us of His own *perfect* knowledge and place with the Father. "I have declared unto them Thy Name, and will declare it." These words give us a clear and unmistakable insight into the intent of His mission, and the purpose of His coming. "That the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them," declare plainly that the Father's Name is the love Name, His heart is revealed. "I in them" tells us that Christ is so closely identified with us that we are bound to the Father's heart for ever. What could satisfy Him more?

## THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

LUKE xxiv. 36 TO END

THESE closing verses of Luke sum up for us very much of the content of the Christian message.

### I

Jesus is a real Person. He lived on earth. He died. He is risen. And He is just as real a Person in His present resurrection state and spiritual condition as when on earth. His condition has changed, but *He* has not changed.

In the incident before us, He takes pains to assure His disciples that this is so. In reality the whole narrative in this last chapter of Luke seems given us to substantiate this fact. The angels say to the women, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" He walks with the two to Emmaus; converses with them; enters their house; eats with them; reveals Himself. During that walk and conversation, and until He vanished, they take Him to be just an ordinary man. "Art Thou only a stranger in Jerusalem?" they say. He speaks, He acts, He looks like any other man. But He vanished. Did this show that, after all, His manhood was unreal? No! He comes into the midst of the gathered disciples afterwards, and there He takes pains to dismiss from their minds the thought that He is a mere phantom. "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have. . . . It is I Myself," He declares. "I Myself." All centres there. Upon that fact the whole truth of Christianity depends. All gathers round and centres in that Person. Here is the beginning, middle, and end of everything. We may

be inclined, like those disciples who "believed not for joy and wondered," to doubt, nevertheless it is true. And everything depends upon that Person and the facts concerning Him. If He is not real, nothing remains. Yet it is taught that "Even if the Life of Jesus were a myth, it would make little or no difference." "True Christian psychology" (whatever that means), we are told, "would remain revelatory of the real nature of God, man and the universe." The truth is that apart from Christ there is no revelation.

To believe in Him is the first thing and the last. First and foremost, Christianity presents to us a Person. To find Him is to possess all. As Philip said long ago to Nathaniel, "We have found Him of Whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph." And when Nathaniel raised an objection, Philip did not need to equivocate or dissemble, nor did he say, "Look at me." Boldly, he exclaims, "Come and See."

## II

Next, we find in these closing verses a reference to the Scriptures which is of the utmost importance, both as to the Scriptures themselves, and in regard to the One of Whom they testify, namely, the One of Whom we have been speaking. The subject of Scripture is not some imaginary character, or mere abstract truth, but a real Person.

The Lord Jesus Christ and the Scriptures are inseparably linked together. "They are they which testify of Me." He links His own words, too, with what was "written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning Himself." He declares that all must be fulfilled. What a place of authority and supremacy the Scriptures have! They possess a character belonging to no other writings.

It is essential we should be clear about this; for if we do not give the Scriptures their place, we are hardly likely to give Christ His proper place, or accord Him

all the glory that belongs to Him ; and our faith will be found to be more or less weak and imperfect. But accepting them as the very word of God, and expressing the mind of God (and we have the authority of Christ for so doing), we come to see that the living Word—the Word become flesh—and the written word are the complements of each other.

The place Christ gives the Scriptures is of vital importance ; and this being so, to doubt them is to doubt Him ; and, in any way to belittle them or detract from them means that our estimate of Him must to the same extent suffer.

So the Lord thought it worth while to remind His disciples of the place the Scriptures have, and we may be thankful we possess His own words with regard to them. He had told them that all things which were written by Moses, and the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Him must be fulfilled. How great He must be to be the subject of Scripture—"the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. xix. 10). How remarkable are the words of the angel when John falls at his feet to worship him : "I am thy fellowservant and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus ; worship God ; for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." As much as to say, "There is nothing interests us more in heaven than that which you possess on earth, namely that which the Spirit of Christ in the prophets has testified" (1 Peter i. 11). And how great and authoritative must these holy writings be—inspired of God in the fullest sense—that they pointed to One Who was coming ; and hundreds of years before His advent could predict the details of His birth, life, death, and resurrection.

When the Sadducees came to Him questioning the resurrection, He says to them, "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God." And when the lawyer enquires "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" our Lord's reply is "What is written in the law?" as though what the

law said was altogether sufficient and absolutely final. Our Lord does not answer the question independently or as from Himself. Could there be a greater testimony to the majesty and supremacy of the law?

### III

Only next to the importance of the Scriptures themselves is the ability to understand them. And we find in verse 45 reference to a very striking action on the part of our Lord. It is thus described: "Then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures." It is a priceless boon to have the Scriptures, but they may be sadly abused and put to a wrong use unless they are understood. Most of the evils which have afflicted the Church—and nearly all the heresies—are the result of not understanding the Scriptures. And one fact in connection with this is as curious as it is amazing, yet it is undeniable, that almost every error in doctrine or practice is supposed to derive its authority from Scripture. That is, Scripture is quoted in support of every departure from sound doctrine. So prevalent is this, and so obvious, that we might suppose the Bible to be the most self-contradictory book in the world. Whereas, properly understood, it is just the reverse. There are two main reasons for what we have just stated. One is, people bring their preconceived ideas to the Bible, instead of deriving their ideas and beliefs *from* the Bible. The other, the proneness to use isolated texts without any concern as to the context. This is a very common habit, in spite of the fact that more often than not it is quite impossible to correctly interpret a single text apart from its context. No book requires to be understood as a *whole*, if its parts are to be correctly understood, so much as does the Bible.

Just recently, the statement above was forcibly illustrated by a religious magazine, which was brought to our notice. Its teaching claimed to be very advanced, and to be on a very high level—nothing less than to



have God within us ; to enjoy fulness of power and uninterrupted joy and peace because of oneness with God, was offered. Yet the need of conversion (except conversion to one idea), the guilt of sin, and need of the sacrifice of Christ to cancel it, found no place. Even Christ Himself hardly seemed necessary, if the writer of one article is to be believed. We have already quoted the words near the commencement of this article.<sup>1</sup> More subtle or dangerous teaching could hardly be imagined—a mixture of New Theology, Pantheism, philosophy and some of the ancient mysteries—yet texts from the Bible were frequently quoted ; but attaching a meaning to the words quite out of harmony with the general teaching of Scripture, and quite away from their context.

Nothing in its way, therefore, can be more important than that the understanding should be opened to understand the Scriptures. It shows that the human understanding of itself is incapable of grasping the true meaning of these inspired writings. It is because men have “leaned to their own understanding” that so many have wandered in the paths of error. Our Lord knew that the human mind, left to itself, could never grasp Divine truth, and so He opened the understanding of the disciples.

We need to notice Who did it. Christ alone can give us the needed understanding. Human teachers cannot do this for us. Human learning will not impart it. And the reason of this is that Christ Himself is the subject of Scripture, and until He reveals Himself we cannot understand it. All the universities in the world, with all their doctors, cannot impart the understanding by which alone we can understand the Scriptures.

We see this from what follows: “He said unto them, Thus it is written and thus it behoved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day.” The importance of those words, “Thus it is written” can-

<sup>1</sup> “Even if the life of Jesus were a myth” this would not affect “the real nature of God and the universe.”

not be exaggerated. It is not what the Church says, or the Pope, or an Archbishop, or some learned theologian, but *what is written*. And what is written mainly concerns Christ's sufferings, death and resurrection and His present and future glory. One inspired writer sums it all up in a few pregnant words, when he claims that the writings of the prophets were nothing less than the inspired utterances of the Holy Spirit, and says, "When it (the Spirit of Christ) testified *beforehand* the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." And again, "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man ; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost " (1 Peter i. 11 and 2 Peter i. 21).

## IV

The next point of importance is the commission given to the Apostles. How important it is to see that this is intimately bound up with the death and resurrection of Christ ! "Thus it behoved Christ to suffer . . . *that*." There are those, alas ! who think and teach that Christ's sufferings have no relation to forgiveness. "God," they say, "did not need that Christ should die in order that He might forgive." In other words, according to their view, the death of Christ is not the ground of forgiveness. No sacrifice was necessary for that purpose, if their view is correct. We may depend upon it that He Who "drove out the man" after the fall—see Genesis iii. 24—and placed cherubim with flaming sword to guard the way of the tree of life, will never receive man back apart from some adequate reason which justifies His doing so. That adequate reason is found in the death of Christ, and only there. So Christ said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood ye have no life in you."

For the same reason, before our Lord commissions His disciples to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins, He refers in the most specific way to His death and resurrection. No announcement of forgiveness was

possible apart from that. Thus not a shadow of doubt is left in our minds as to the intimate and vital connection there is between the sufferings of Christ and the forgiveness of sins.

Three things are indissolubly linked together in verses 46 and 47. First, "It is written." The Scriptures are absolutely authentic and authoritative. God is the author of them, though He employed human instruments. And the Scriptures must be accepted as a Divine statement regarding God and His purpose, Christ and His work, the sinner and his salvation, and as giving us all we need to know regarding divine and human relations. And if not so accepted, we wrong our own souls as well as dishonour God, and suffer grievous loss in consequence.

Second, Christ's death and resurrection. These two facts form the basis of everything, and are the means by which everything is accomplished. All Scripture points to them—both onward and backward. The ceremonies and sacrifices of old foreshadowed them.

Third, the preaching—"repentance and remission of sins." A risen and glorified Christ must be proclaimed. God finds in His death a righteous basis on the ground of which the utmost mercy and the fullest grace can reach the repentant sinner. And in that same One risen He has placed man beyond all the ills that afflict him. Sin, death and judgment can no more appal, for the "Lord is risen indeed," and God has declared His complete satisfaction in Him as Man by placing Him on the highest pinnacle of glory. The sinner has only to realize by faith all that this means to be perfectly at rest, and to feel that God could not have done better for him. Christ in glory tells him the whole story of righteousness and love, judgment and mercy, and final salvation. All expressed in that word of the Apostle: "The salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." The highest purposes of love will be achieved.

That message goes forth still—as it has gone forth all down the Christian centuries—in the Name of Him

Who became Man and came to earth to accomplish the Will of God. He came into the world to save sinners, and He can save all who put their trust in Him. The preacher of the Gospel does not carry some message of his own, or another man's, nor does its success depend upon his own ability, whether of learning or eloquence. The earliest proclaimers of the message were *sent*; and so to-day it is essential that everyone should be called and equipped. They need to be impressed with the greatness of the One in Whose Name they go forth, and the greatness of the news they announce; and, not least, the *truth* of it; and that it is for all—of every nation and every class and every condition. The Gospel was to be preached “among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

## V

But one thing was necessary, and it is just as necessary to-day. And this brings us to the fifth point. We refer to the words in verse 49:

“And behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”

No one had ever spoken such words before. Elijah had said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.” And when the request came for a double portion of his spirit, Elijah said “Thou hast asked a hard thing.” But the Lord had already said to His disciples, “I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter.” And now He says definitely, “I send the promise of My Father upon you.” There are no conditions, such as “If thou see Me,” as in Elisha's case, but simply what He Himself would do. And yet not acting apart from, or independently of, the Father; for the Father is the source of all these operations. Nevertheless, Christ could say He would send the One the Father promised. And so, once more, as we have already seen, the greatness and majesty of the Lord appears. His conversation with the two on the road is about

Himself ; all Scripture bears witness to Him ; " It is I Myself," He declared in the midst of his disciples, as though everything depended upon that fact ; all that was written concerning Him must be fulfilled ; His death and resurrection not only fulfilled Scripture, but satisfied every requirement : and in His Name a message was to go forth into all the world which would not only declare God to man as He had never been declared before, but bring salvation and gladness into myriads of lives.

Yet one thing more was necessary to complete and perfect all the rest. It was not enough for Christ to be Who He was ; and not enough for Him to do what He did. The Third Person of the Trinity must come. The Holy Spirit must work. His presence must be felt. The Gospel must be " preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." There was the Father's promise, the Son's performance, but without the Holy Spirit's power, nothing could be effectual. The three adorable Persons of the Trinity have been everlastingly bound together in an indissoluble relationship, and everlastingly in closest co-operation. Father, Son and Spirit always existed ; and one never existed without the others. To speak of God apart from these distinctions is as meaningless as it is unintelligible.

When our Lord uttered these profound words upon which we are dwelling He was referring to that which, in a peculiar and special way, would characterize the dispensation about to be introduced. But it is always so much easier to live in a past dispensation than in one that is present. And the danger of missing the characteristic truth of to-day is always with us. On every hand we see how Christians have slipped back into Judaism, both in their modes of thought and worship. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit is little understood, even if not totally ignored. Take Paul's statement in Philippians iii. 3 : " We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the

flesh," as a delineation of Christianity, and we shall perceive at once how few, comparatively, reach this standard.

The early disciples, even, could not do anything until they were "endued with power from on high." How much less can we? Where is that power manifested to-day? The weakness and incapacity which are so conspicuous are due to the fact that He is grieved, and quenched, and often forgotten.

Why is this? Simply because we misunderstand His mission and fail to appreciate the errand upon which He has come. We have plenty of confidence in the flesh. But He has none. We often rejoice in something else rather than in Christ Jesus. He has come solely for His glory. Our worship is largely sensuous. He is the only inspirer of true worship.

Those early disciples had to tarry till He came. We often think we can run without Him. We have more machinery than they had, but where is the driving power? "Tarry ye!" Think of those waiting days! What expectations must have filled their hearts! Days filled with prayer and expectancy. And then at last that Divine afflatus—the rushing mighty wind and the tongues of flame—and the house filled, and each individual ablaze with Divine energy and zeal. Was it not worth the tarrying? On the day of Pentecost they knew that Christ's word had come true; they knew that He had "been by the right hand of God exalted and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost He had shed forth this." They knew that henceforth He was not only *with* them but *in* them.

And so the Scriptures have been fulfilled; the work has been done; Christ has been exalted: and the power has been given. Christianity is no trifle. There is nothing lacking.

## VI

And now, lastly, we come to the closing verses of Luke's Gospel and they are full of instruction (*vv.* 50-3). "And He led them out as far as to Bethany."

"He led them out." Does not this remind us of similar words in John x? Having entered in by the door into the sheepfold, we read, "He leadeth them out" (v. 3). The meaning of Christianity is largely wrapped up in these words. Christianity is a "going out," and a "going in." An outside place on earth, because we are within the veil. So we read in Hebrews xiii. that "Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach." So now, having already gone outside all earthly and carnal forms of worship—all that appertained to the flesh—He leads out His disciples.

But it is not an aimless journey, it is "to Bethany." He does not lead them to the temple. We might have thought *that* would have been the appropriate place. What a spectacle that would have presented! the One Who had been crucified, to ascend to Heaven in the sight of multitudes of onlookers from such a place! But man's way is not God's way. The Temple with all its magnificence and sacredness was left behind. Indeed, soon it was to be utterly destroyed, and the whole system, with which it stood connected, swept away. Bethany is chosen. Was it because Christianity was to partake of the character of the home far more than of grand ceremonial and imposing ritual? At least that appears to have been the Divine intention. It was in a house the Lord came into the midst of His own (John xx. 19). How far there has been a return to the other, we are all conscious of to-day.

But Bethany was where, if anywhere, Christ had a home on earth. There Martha showed Him hospitality, and Mary sat at His feet; and there they made Him a supper just before His death. We are told that Jesus "loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus," and we may be quite sure they loved Him. And Christ grants His Presence to those who love Him. This is His promise (John xiv. 21-3), a promise He still fulfils; for His Presence, known and enjoyed, is an outstanding

feature of Christianity. And so He led them out as far as to Bethany: to the place where He had been understood and appreciated and where His company had been welcome. It is where He leads His own to-day. Sometimes the choice has to be made between what the Temple offers and Himself. For alas! in the course of the centuries, the return journey has been made, and not to the gain of those who have taken it.<sup>1</sup>

To Bethany we must go, and there must we stay, if we are to be fully blessed. How aimless our Christian course often is. There is nothing aimless when our Lord leads us. "He led them out as far as to Bethany." Or, if our footsteps are not aimless, we often pursue ways of our own. Here, "He led them."

Only when they arrived at Bethany did He lift up His hands and bless them. And this indicates what is meant by being led out, and led as far as Bethany. It is not to some sacred spot; nor to some system; nor is it merely a matter of some old traditions and associations; certainly not anything ecclesiastical. It is the place where Christ lifts up His hands and blesses, and where, as a consequence, He receives in return what satisfies Him. Martha served: Lazarus sat at the table with Him; and Mary brought forth her spikenard: service, communion, worship. All these are still found at "Bethany," and there He still blesses.

There is no mere accident in all this, as if some other place would have done equally well. Yet it was not the mere place, of course, as we have already indicated.

And there He blessed them, and not at Jerusalem or in the Temple. Even those sacred places could not bestow what His blessing conveyed.

"And it came to pass while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven."

His last act is one of blessing. This tells us how

<sup>1</sup> It may be said that the disciples immediately returned to Jerusalem and were continually in the Temple. But that was only temporary, and does not affect what is here said.



much they were to Him. He was leaving them, but they were everything to Him, and this lifting up of the hands not only told of His present interest but was an indication of that untiring and unceasing service He would render on their behalf at the right hand of God. For He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. What must have been the blessing of One Who was going straight into Heaven and to the right hand of God, and to Whom belonged such position, power and authority? The parting might seem to detract from the blessing. But it was far otherwise. It was not a parting blessing merely. The parting was necessary in order to gain fuller and further blessing.

And what contrast this scene presents to all that happened in connection with the first man and his fall! He left no blessing behind, but a curse. He was expelled from the earthly Paradise: "So He drove out the man." The Second Man is here "carried up into heaven." The way to the tree of life was barred, and the flaming sword of judgment kept the way. What a welcome awaited the Second Man as He ascended on high! Of Him it could be said, "Angels and authorities and powers are made subject unto Him." The first man lost everything and incurred death, and brought in sin and sorrow. The Second vanquishes death, puts away sin and leaves all the sad fruits of the fall behind for ever, and enters the highest glory, and all things are given into His hands. What can the heart wish for more than such a sight? What does not His blessing mean? "He blessed them." And He Who blessed them was immediately carried by Divine power to the place of exaltation. He is "crowned with glory and honour."

Yes, there is one thing more the heart desires. That those heavens should open, and He should reappear. That

"He Who with hands uplifted  
Went from the earth below,  
Should come again all gifted  
His blessings to bestow."

## THE PRESENT COMPANY OF CHRIST AND THE FUTURE KINGDOM

THE fourteenth chapter of John is remarkable in many ways, but, amongst others, for this fact, that our Lord's discourse is interrupted no less than three times. First by Thomas—the reasoning, unbelieving Thomas—who says, “We know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?” The logic is faultless. It is his faith and intelligence that are at fault. Then the ardent Philip breaks in—the man of feeling and affection: “Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” And lastly, Judas (not Iscariot), “Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?”

In each case, the interruption leads to a deeper unfolding of the truth on the Lord's part. This is true in regard to the last as much as any of the others. The remark of Judas showed that the disciples were still occupied with Jewish expectations and earthly hopes.

The Lord had been speaking of keeping His commandments, and impressed upon them the important fact that obedience was the real test of love; promising that He would manifest Himself to those who loved Him. This arouses the query, “How is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world?” Such a secret and partial manifestation did not seem to fit their conception of the Messiah. This leads our Lord to repeat, and enlarge upon, what He had already said. The time for the world-manifestation had not come yet. But in the meanwhile, there might be the closest intimacy between the Lord and those who loved Him, and who expressed that love by their obedience.

Here, then, we have a supreme and most vital truth for the moment. Something which all devoted disciples should enjoy throughout the present dispensation, while the Kingdom and public manifestation wait. Christ would grant His presence and give His company, in the fullest and most intimate way to the loving heart during His absence. To the one who not only kept His expressed commands, but who also kept His word (singular here, not plural) : that is, living so near to Him, and in such intimacy, as to know intuitively what would please Him : to such as love Him in this way the Lord promises : " My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." This is the rich and peculiar blessing we may enjoy, before the Lord takes the Kingdom and manifests Himself to the world.

If we are fully to appreciate and enter into this blessing, we must understand what the Lord says in this same chapter about the Comforter.

A change takes place when we come to verse 15, which we do well to note. The change to which we refer is that the word " love " is substituted for the word " believe." The chapter is divided into two, almost equal, sections, the first being characterized by the word " believe," the other by the word " love." This change is not arbitrary, nor is it a distinction without a difference. It is a fact of supreme importance, which we cannot afford to disregard, that certain blessings become ours as we " believe," but others can only be enjoyed as we " love."

It is equally significant that the change of word takes place in connection with our Lord's first reference to the Comforter. The words with which our Lord introduces the subject are : " If ye love Me, keep My commandments, and I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter." Do not these words seem to state the condition, without which the presence of that Comforter cannot be enjoyed, nor His power and help be known ? " If ye love ME " : all

hangs upon that. Can we for a moment imagine that the Comforter would be of much assistance to anyone who did not love Christ? He has come expressly with reference to Christ, to glory Him, and is here in the closest co-operation with Christ—His servant, as well as being His very Spirit, as the Lord reveals a little further on. How much that Spirit will be to us, depends therefore upon how much Christ is to us!

But it may be asked, Do not all believers love Christ, as a matter of course? Do not faith and love go together? Not necessarily. If it were so, why should the Lord in this chapter make such a distinction between them, and make certain things depend upon faith and others upon love? Then again, obedience is the evidence of love. Are all believers obedient? And lastly, our Lord does not rebuke the Church at Ephesus for want of faith, but for want of love. Love is not the condition of our *receiving* the gift of the Spirit—as Ephesians i. 13 clearly shows. It is absolutely the condition, if His presence is to be fully known and enjoyed.

Then the Lord proceeds to tell His disciples some facts about the Holy Spirit, which have an important bearing upon the subject of our meditation.

The Comforter is the Spirit of Truth (v. 17). We do well to note this. Truth is a word which stands out very conspicuously in John's Gospel. In chapter i. 14 we find it linked with grace, and both words are mentioned in close and striking relation to the Word as becoming flesh. From chapter viii. 32 we learn that the great characteristic of those who are "disciples indeed" is said to be: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." In verse 40 of the same chapter, the Lord speaks of himself to the Jews as "a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God." Passing on to the chapter before us, the Lord speaking of Himself says, "I am the way, the *truth* and the life." And we know that before Pilate He sums up His whole mission in the words: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I

into the world, that I should bear witness unto the *truth*." Remembering this, how significant is the fact that over and over again the Comforter is spoken of as the Spirit of Truth.

Thus if Christ is the Truth, and came to bear witness to the Truth, and the Holy Spirit has come expressly as the Spirit of Truth, it follows that there is the closest possible identity between His mission and that of Christ. The fact of the matter is, the Holy Spirit is continuing the witness, and, in that sense, the work of Christ.

Bearing this in mind, we shall better understand our Lord's meaning in what follows. At the end of verse 17 occur these words, "But ye know Him; for He dwelleth *with* you and shall be *in* you." Now here the Lord evidently speaks of the Holy Spirit in a double way. "He dwelleth *with* you, and shall be *in* you." But, be it noted, He immediately adds: "I will not leave you comfortless (orphans): I will come to you." That is, the Spirit of Truth would be His Spirit. Christ henceforth would not be with them in an external manner merely, but He would be *in* them by His Spirit.

It was just this that made such a tremendous difference in the Apostles before the descent of the Holy Ghost and after. Consequent upon what happened at Pentecost, Christ was nearer to them than ever. Not only *with* them but *in* them. He came to them. Verse 18 possibly has another meaning. The words, probably, were literally fulfilled at the resurrection, when He came through the closed door, and stood in their midst, and said, "Peace be unto you." "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." Joy displaced fear. They were no longer orphans. But even that was not all that He meant. For during those forty days He was often away from them. "I will come to you," was only fully realized at Pentecost.

All this prepares us for the thought of what His company means, and for the realization of it. As the effect of the Holy Spirit's presence we see Him (Christ)

though He is unseen by the world, and the words of verse 20 are fulfilled: "At that day (the coming of the Spirit) ye shall know that I am in My Father and ye in Me and I in you." He is one with the Father; we are one with Him; and He is one with us. What a blessed union! By the Spirit's power we become conscious of our place before the Father as one with Christ, and not only so, but conscious also that He is in us down here.

All this has been leading us on to the truth which is mainly before us, and now brings us to the very verge of it. It is not only that we are in the most blessed position possible as those who are in Christ before God, but that we may enjoy the presence and company of Christ, day by day, in our passage through the world. He has gone to prepare us an abode in the Father's House, we are to make our hearts His abode down here, in the meantime.

We cannot read verses 21-3 of John xiv. without realizing the importance of the truth they contain. All depends upon love—a love expressed in obedience.

"He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love Him and will manifest Myself to Him" (v. 21).

Now this does not mean that, in the first instance, we have to love Christ before He loves us. He manifested His love to us long before we had any love to Him. "We love Him because He first loved us." But it does mean that certain consequences flow from our love to Him. Christ manifests Himself to us. He does not promise such manifestation to those whose hearts are cold and indifferent. Do not let us confuse this with God's dealings with sinners. The two things are not parallel at all. Here the manifestation referred to is a special manifestation to the loving heart. It is a manifestation to those who have the Spirit of Christ. The world does not see Christ in this sense.

As He had just said : " The world seeth Me no more, but ye see Me " (v. 19).

What a wondrous blessing is here unfolded ! " He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love Him." Could it possibly be excelled ? Ought we not to desire to have this experience above everything else in the world ?

How are we to distinguish between love, as Christ speaks of it here, and the love which Christ has for all His own ? At the beginning of the previous chapter we read : " Having loved His own " ; and this includes all, and is, of course, perfectly true. But this is His love to His own, not their love to Him. Nothing ever can alter the first. Nothing can ever weaken it. But our love to Him is a very different matter. That may fade and fail, alas ! And if it does, while His love to us hasn't changed, He cannot manifest Himself to us as He would. To use a simple illustration. A mother's love may be the same to all her children, but if one is disobedient, the mother may have to withdraw her presence from the rebellious child.

Is Christ so much to us that the withdrawal of His presence is the last thing we desire, but the manifestation of it the thing we covet most ? What a privilege ! How much it means ! I will *manifest* MYSELF to him ! As we have seen, one of the disciples expresses surprise. " How is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us," he says, " and not unto the world ? " The time has not come for that. As far as our natural inclinations go, such a manifestation appeals to us, and possibly would be preferred by us. No doubt there was something of this nature at the back of the question Judas asked. A certain amount of surprise, and even regret, seems to lurk beneath it. " How is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world ? " Is there not something of this with ourselves ? A manifestation to the world, involving worldly homage and universal acknowledgment, appeals to our natural tastes far more than any secret manifestation. Yet

there is something in the individual and secret manifestation which the other can never give. Ask the loving and devoted wife which she would prefer, to witness the public honours conferred upon her husband, or, the enjoyment of her own private meeting with him, and welcome, on his return home? This is nothing more than an illustration, but it indicates the difference. Both doubtless have their place, but the public acknowledgment would mean little to her, if the other were lacking. And the same is true, surely, on the husband's part.

And can we not, reading beneath the surface, discern something of our Lord's own feelings, as He speaks to His disciples, on the eve of His departure, about their love to Him, and the communion there would be in consequence? Is He not dwelling upon that which is nearest to His own heart? Is He not saying: "I want you to know all that you may enjoy of My company though I am absent, and I want you to realize all that this will mean to Me." And so He says, "He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." And then the question asked, only brings out an even fuller statement, giving, if possible, a deeper insight into all that such a promise would mean:

"If a man love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

And the one condition on the ground of which this lavish promise shall be fulfilled—a promise which contains within itself all that even His love could do—is that we *love Him*. Nothing less than the company of the Father and the Son—nothing less than all their presence means—is within our reach, and on the easiest possible terms. For we only need to know Him, in order to love Him. And more: there is all His love to awaken ours—a love already given.

Let us pause and ask ourselves, whether we have



fully weighed His words? whether we have ever given them sufficient thought? And also, whether we know their meaning from personal experience? And, if not, have we ever properly estimated the loss which we suffer? "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." What else can be a substitute for this?

We often think, perhaps, of the words that occur at the beginning of the chapter which speak of the Father's House where there are "many mansions" (abodes); and we anticipate His coming again to receive us to Himself, that where He is there we may be also, and think of all that it will mean to be with Him. But do we realize that, in the meantime, He asks us to prepare an *abode* for Him? (The very word, we believe, is the same.) The abode He seeks is the heart that loves Him. And all that makes heaven what it is, and will ever be, may to a certain extent be ours now, for we may have the presence of the Father and the Son; and a foretaste of that love which "fills the heavens with eternal song." The only difference is in *us*, not in the company. *There* we shall be as perfect as our surroundings, and there will be no hindrance to our full enjoyment, here we have to mourn our coldness and are subject to every kind of distraction. Nevertheless, even here and now, we have only to realize in a small measure the truth of what our Lord speaks of to enjoy an experience which lifts us to heaven, and brings heaven down to us. Something which even the Kingdom, by and by, with all its glories, will never afford.

#### Revelation iii. 20-2

If we turn now to the above passage we find the two subjects we have been dwelling upon, namely, "The Present Company of Christ" and the "Future Kingdom" standing in identical relation, the one to the other, as in John xiv. In verse 20 we read:

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear

My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

Here, Christ's present company is guaranteed to the one who hears His voice and opens the door.

And then in verse 21 we read :

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."

We need not enlarge upon this, as the reader will find the subject treated somewhat fully in the chapter headed, "Laodicea : A Last Message." But we call attention to the striking fact that in two entirely distinct passages stress is laid upon the present company of Christ : and in both cases this stands in juxtaposition with the coming Kingdom. What we desire above everything is, that the reader may be arrested by the emphatic way in which our Lord speaks of hearing His voice and opening the door, and the promise of His presence as a consequence. This is spoken of as if it were of more importance than anything else. And the reason is, that, here is the test of how much Christ really means to us. Are we not inclined to give service, or something else, first place ? One thing is evident. In our Lord's estimation His coming to us and supping with us, and we with Him, takes precedence of everything else. Emphasis is laid upon it, in what is now before the reader, in the hope that some may in the future enjoy this experience as never before.

It will be a wonderful moment when we sit with Him in His throne ; when all things are put in subjection under Him, and He is universally acknowledged. But even that will, in certain respects, lack what is promised in the other. For Him to sup with us now, and we with Him, in this time of His rejection, is an experience that even the Kingdom itself cannot offer. That will mean public display and acknowledgment ; but for Him to sup with us and we with Him means He gives His own presence in which none can share and where

none can intrude—and HE is more even than His throne. And if we have entertained Him in this way during His rejection, possibly to share His throne, by and by, will mean more to us than it will to others. *Now* He wishes to sit with us, *then* we shall sit with Him !

## REVIVAL : AND THE WAY TO IT <sup>1</sup>

I SAMUEL vii.

**T**HERE is always something of deep interest about revivals. They are times when the power of God is really in evidence, and when mere appearance and make-believe drop off ; things are seen in their true character ; the chaff becomes separated from the wheat, and there is manifest blessing to the souls of men, and abiding fruit for God.

But what we are apt to forget is, that, a true revival, in the first instance, is a revival of God's people. The conversion of those outside is the aftermath. The work begins in the hearts of God's children and then spreads far and wide. There are always the basketsful of fragments—the over and above : but the multitude must first be fed.

In the passage before us, we have a divinely authorized account of a very remarkable revival in the history of God's earthly people ; and some important lessons may be learned from what preceded and accompanied it.

The account opens with a very significant reference to the ark :

“ The men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord.”

The ark of the covenant was the most sacred symbol of Israel's relationship with Jehovah. We remember how the cloud of glory, the symbol of Jehovah's presence, rested upon it ; we remember the place it occupied in

<sup>1</sup> Can be obtained separately. Price 2*d.* or 1*s.* 8*d.* per dozen.

the innermost shrine—the very holy of holies ; also, that, within were found the tables of the covenant, the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded. Thus the ark, and everything that pertained to it, pointed to Christ. It foreshadows Him in relation to God's government, His provision for His people, and the accomplishment of all His purposes.

Very significant, then, is this reference to the ark at the beginning of the narrative. It is brought into the house of Abinadab, and Eleazar is sanctified to keep it. So in every revival Christ is exalted and glorified. We do not mean that every revival takes place in precisely the same way, or that every feature is identical in each case, they are by no means all cast exactly in the same mould, yet what we do affirm is that in each and all Christ and His atoning sacrifice become prominent and fill their appointed place. He is lifted up and made glorious in the eyes of His people, and they sanctify the Lord God in their hearts. What is needed above everything to-day is that Christ should regain His place in the affections of His people.

Nor did the revival come all at once. Due preparation and much prayer will be found to precede, we believe, every such work of God. And so the next thing we are told is that "the time was long ; for it was twenty years : and all the house of Israel *lamented after the Lord.*" The significance of this statement can hardly be overestimated. There is nothing quite like it in all the history of Israel. It indicates complete dissatisfaction with the prevailing condition, and this is ever the prelude of revival. The very worst condition to be in is one of complacency and self-satisfaction ; to be saying, "*I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.*" In marked contrast with this, we are told, "All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." Because of their sins He had withdrawn ; and now they missed Him. His presence and His power were longed for. It is an excellent sign when we begin to make this discovery, and there is deep

soul exercise in consequence. This is where all true revival begins. We live, alas! oftentimes, as if we had quite enough of God. It is a hungering and crying after Him that is needed. Where is this soul exercise to-day? Where is this kind of lamentation to be heard? The majority of people—even so-called Christian people—appear to be quite contented. May God awaken within us an intense dissatisfaction with ourselves and with things around us. Not the spirit of mere fault finding, but a divine discontent inwrought by the Spirit of God—a discontent and a return as expressed in the words—“*All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.*” Revival cannot be worked up: it cannot be engineered: it must descend; like every other “good and perfect gift,” it is from above.

This was the occasion seized upon by Samuel. It was easy to speak to people in such a frame of mind.

“And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, *and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only.*”

Lamentation, however right in its place and however necessary, is not sufficient of itself. Four things are necessary: first, “return,” but this is not enough: we must “put away”; then there must be preparation of heart; and, finally, a rendering to God what is His due.<sup>1</sup>

Would to God there might be heard the voice of lamentation amongst professing Christians to-day, instead of the smooth self-satisfaction and contentedness which seem so prevalent: some recognition of failure, and a crying after the Lord, and this followed by a return unto Him and a putting away of the strange gods (and, oh, how many there are!) and a real preparation of heart to serve the Lord.

It is very interesting, and equally refreshing and encouraging, to see that the children of Israel were

<sup>1</sup> Read in this connection the article on “Repentance.”

obedient to Samuel's exhortation. There must be obedience, if there is to be blessing; and it is only when the conditions laid down by Samuel are complied with that he says, "Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord." Two things need to be noted here. First, the absolute necessity for individual exercise before any corporate action can be entered upon. And, second, Samuel would not have prayed to God for them unless his reproofs had been heeded, and his exhortations obeyed. As to the first of these, we discover in it the reason why public meetings for prayer are often futile. There has been no real individual exercise, even if there is some agreement as to the need for prayer. To come, more in the spirit of the Pharisee than ought else, to thank God I am not as other men, is worse than useless. And as to the second, repentance (that is, doing the other thing) alone can impart reality and sincerity to our petitions, without which they have no chance of success. "And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord." It is well to notice the name of the place where they were to be gathered, and its meaning. Mizpeh (or Mizpah) means beacon or watch tower. We need to be apart from the world and its spirit, if we are to pray effectively; and only from the beacon can we take account of the signs of the times, and thus discover the necessity for prayer.

In Isaiah xxi. 8, we read of one who could say, "I stand continually upon the watch tower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights." And Habakkuk says, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." If we are to pray aright we must submit to be reproved.

And now we are called upon to notice a very significant action on the part of those assembled at Mizpeh.

"They drew water, and poured it out before the Lord."

It is possible to learn from other Scriptures the signifi-

cance of this act. The wise woman of Tekoah, describing man's natural instability and helplessness, declares : " For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again." And in another Scripture we find one saying, " I am poured out like water." It is as much as to say : We are nothing, and can do nothing ; if anything is to be done God must do it. But then, to take our true place is always the path of blessing and precursor of revival. Poured out like water is weakness personified. Are we prepared to take such a place ? But there is encouragement to be found in it, for it plainly declares that revival does not depend upon any power that we may possess.

We are told, the water was poured out *before the Lord*. That makes a considerable difference. They owned what they were before Him, and to take our true place before God is half the victory. And from this place of emptiness, and nothingness, and weakness, they were soon to arise and fall upon the Philistines with overwhelming effect. Here then is one great secret of revival. To pretend to no power, but trusting only in God, own our weakness. " When I am weak, then am I strong," was the experience of one of the strongest of men. And it was because he had learned that lesson he accomplished so much. And it was when Jacob's thigh was out of joint he received his greatest blessing.

Accompanying this striking act, we have *fasting and confession*. Do we realize that fasting can bring us into a condition in which God's voice can be heard and His will obeyed ? Fasting is more than abandoning evil courses ; it is more than abstention from food ; it may mean the turning aside, for the time being, from things that in themselves are lawful and right. Fasting is laying aside all that would hinder unbroken communion with God. It sets us at liberty for the " watch tower " (Mizpeh). Fasting shuts man out : prayer brings God in.

But there was more even than fasting, *there was confession*. They " fasted on that day, and said there,



We have *sinned* against the Lord." This was the climax. "They said there, We have sinned against the Lord." Said where? On the watch tower: where everything can be clearly seen, and seen in the light of heaven; in the place of brokenness and emptiness; in the hour of their refusal of all that ministered to their natural tastes and appetites! This is where true confession is inspired, and this is where it is uttered. We cannot fail to observe the brevity of this confession, but it was enough. The true quality of confession is not in its length, but in its depth. The publican cried out, "God be merciful to me the sinner," but this was enough. "*We have sinned against the Lord.*" How short, but how sufficient! There are times when the more people say the less they mean; and there are other occasions when brevity is not only the soul of wit, but the very soul of our soul.

And, then, notice what follows upon this, "And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh." If there is confession to God, there must also be reparation to man, and then it is God can work.

At first sight this action on the part of Israel, right and proper as it was, seems to expose them to fresh trouble. We read that—

As soon as "the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the Lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it they were afraid of the Philistines."

God always puts our sincerity to the test. He will have reality. Are the Israelites prepared to trust God? They seem to have exposed themselves to a fearful danger. Will they wait to see what He can do? Before to-day it has happened that someone who has turned to God with new resolves has had to endure trying circumstances. Their faith and courage have been tried to the utmost. The old beaten tracks seemed so easy, so pleasant, and free from difficulty. The new path they have entered seems beset with trial. In this

connection, we may learn a lesson from what follows in the chapter before us. If the Philistines had not been allowed to come, if danger had not threatened, the mighty deliverance which Israel experienced could never have been known. The place of weakness and confession and of new resolve may be the occasion of the enemy's assault, and we may be sure he will take advantage of it, if he can, but in dependence upon God it will prove the place of victory, and of a wonderful experience of Divine power.

“And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a *burnt offering wholly unto the Lord*: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him.”

A sucking lamb! This was all that seemed to stand between Israel and their enemies. How weak and insufficient such protection appeared. Yet this is all that Samuel relies upon. He does not marshal the forces that were available; he does not set the battle in array; his trust is evidently not in shield or spear, or in a human arm. All he takes is a sucking lamb, and offers it wholly unto the Lord.

But it was a *burnt offering*, and this is the whole secret. It spoke of the ground of their acceptance with God, and of what enabled Him righteously to undertake their cause. And “if God be for us, who can be against us?”

The ground of our acceptance with God is the worthiness of *Another*. Christ offered Himself on the Cross entirely to God for the accomplishment of His will, and it was then He was made sin for us, and bore the judgment sin deserved. But the burnt offering speaks of His own acceptance to God at that moment. All His personal and moral perfection—all His love and devotedness—were present to the eye and heart of God and all ascended to Him as a sweet savour, and that becomes the measure of our acceptance with God. It was in this sense, that the sucking lamb spoke to God.

But there is another aspect to the truth of the burnt offering. If God is to intervene on His people's behalf there must be the practical answer to this in their own lives. In other words, our acceptability must be in keeping with our acceptance. "Wherefore also," says the Apostle, "we make it our aim . . . to be well-pleasing (acceptable) unto Him" (2 Cor. v. 9, R.V.). And he thus exhorts believers. "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." We are to be here wholly for the will of God.

The sucking lamb which Samuel offered is expressive of all this. First of all, it spoke of the ground of their acceptance, it foreshadowed the perfect burnt offering that Christ the Lamb, foreordained before the foundation of the world, would be ; but at the same time it represented the offering of themselves to God for the accomplishment of His will in them, and was the recognition of their absolute helplessness and dependence upon Him.

What a beautiful moral order is observable throughout the whole course of Israel's recovery and revival. (1) A lamenting after the Lord ; (2) a putting away of all that was displeasing to Him ; (3) a preparation of heart to serve Him ; (4) a recognition of their weakness, with fasting and confession ; (5) a sucking lamb for a burnt offering. Dependence and wholehearted surrender.

As we have said, the burnt offering was all that appeared to stand between Israel and their enemies. "And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel." But that burnt offering was better than whole battalions of armed men. God could undertake their case now. There is nothing God cannot do for and with a people who are both accepted and acceptable. What He seeks to do is to bring us where He can bless us. And if we present ourselves to Him wholly and unreservedly for His will

to be done in us, and there is that entire dependence, of which the sucking lamb is so expressive, all hindrance is removed, and He is free to accomplish the end He has in view. "*The Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them: and they were smitten before Israel.*"

There is no more wonderful sight than to see God's people defenceless in the presence of a powerful enemy, and God able to take their part, and to gain for them a complete and overwhelming victory, simply because they have turned to Him in repentance and faith.

There are two essential features in all revival—a sense of sin and of acceptance. The one we are contemplating possessed both: "All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord," and said, "We have sinned," and abandoned their evil ways; and then they took their stand on the ground of the burnt offering—perfect acceptance with God because of the worthiness of Another. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" is the question asked. And the answer to that question is the answer to all questions: "It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. viii. 34).

How is this great victory commemorated? "*Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.*" This is revival, to obtain help. "Having obtained help of God," says the Apostle, "I continue." "God hath not given us the spirit of fear," he writes, "but of power and of love, and of a sound mind." What greater favour can there be than to receive Divine help? The consequence of this was the complete recovery of all that the Philistines had taken away from Israel. Revival means recovery. The lost ground is regained (vv. 13-14).

The chapter closes with a brief but comprehensive summary of the history of Israel under Samuel's administration. We are told that "Samuel judged Israel all

the days of his life ” ; and then of the circuit he took year by year, and this is not without instruction.

“ And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places.”

The names of these places are very suggestive, and indicate, we believe, how revival is to be maintained. Bethel means, the house of God ; Gilgal was the place of circumcision, where God rolled away the reproach of Egypt ; and Mizpeh, as we have seen, is the watch tower. It was a remarkable circuit. If revival is to be maintained, we must be in constant touch with what is involved in the history of these places.

Bethel is God’s house. Our minds are at once carried back to Genesis xxviii., and to an incident in Jacob’s experience which left an indelible mark upon all his subsequent history. The record gives us the account of Jacob’s dream of the ladder set up on the earth, whose top reached to heaven, and tells us how God appeared to him. When Jacob awaked out of his sleep he exclaimed, “ Surely the Lord is in this place ; and I knew it not,” and he called it “ the house of God and the gate of heaven.”

Clearly the meaning of all this is that the house of God is where we are conscious of the Divine presence, and where He manifests Himself to us. Four things mark the house of God : (1) It is where He dwells ; (2) where He is approached—“ the gate of heaven ” ; (3) where He manifests Himself ; (4) a witness to His character, that men might come to know Him. Jacob sets up a pillar, and the house of God is said to be “ the pillar and base of the truth ” (1 Tim. iii. 15).

Jacob had to return to Bethel. His first real start with God was made there. In Genesis xxxv. we read of God’s message to him, “ Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there.” So the first place mentioned on Samuel’s circuit is Bethel. Revival is a return to Bethel.

The next is Gilgal—the place of circumcision. Spiritual circumcision is the “ putting off of the body

of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." As regards the flesh and its working we need ever to remain in the place of death. "The flesh profiteth nothing." "I know," said the Apostle, "that in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell." And, again, he describes those who are of the true circumcision as having "no confidence in the flesh." It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this truth. How weak we become, how easily we fail, when we walk in the flesh instead of in the Spirit. The flesh must ever be kept in the place of practical circumcision.

And the third place was Mizpeh—the watch tower. If we are not constantly on the watch tower we soon lose touch with God. How we need to remind ourselves of the words of Habakkuk already quoted, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." Intercourse with God must never be allowed to lapse.

Such was the circuit Samuel took from year to year. Do we not need to bring the circuit of our lives within these boundaries? and on the other hand, to guard against any narrower limits. We must complete the circuit, and no single place must be omitted—Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpeh must all be included within it.

And we need to notice the order. Bethel comes first—the place of the presence of the Lord. God's house, where He reveals Himself, and where we have access by one Spirit to the Father, and which is the pillar and base (support) of the truth—this must have precedence. If we are not right as to our altar, we can hardly be right at any other part of the circuit. It is the place where God's honour dwelleth, that must be our first concern. "To see Thy power and Thy glory so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary," must be our uppermost desire. God's chief interest must be ours; and we are feeble in proportion as it is not so. "We are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." There can be no place to us like the place

where God appears to us, nor does anything affect us like His presence. "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar unto God that appeared to thee."

While Samuel could only be in one place at one time, with us it is a question of state and spiritual experience, and Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpeh coalesce. Israel had ever to return to Gilgal. And in chapter xi. of this first book of Samuel we find him saying, "Come and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there." Gilgal is the place of renewal. Revival cannot be maintained apart from the practical recognition of the truth of Gilgal. The reason we are in such a deplorable condition is because we have forgotten one marked feature of Christianity, namely, having "no confidence in the flesh." We are not at Gilgal. The consequence is that when we come together as God's people there is much fleshly activity, and very little manifestation of the Spirit's power. Only as we are at Gilgal can we "worship by the Spirit of God" (Phil. iii. 3). And this truth needs to be equally recognized as regards our service. How much energy of the flesh finds its way into the work we attempt for God? What schemes are devised, and methods adopted, in which the Spirit of God has no part, and which He has never promoted? Gilgal is the place of felt weakness and nothingness, where we do not flinch from the application of the Cross, and consequently it is the place where we learn the secret of true spiritual power and effectiveness. We rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh. The measure in which we make everything of Christ—"rejoice in Christ Jesus"—will be the measure of our spiritual power, because self is excluded and the Holy Spirit is free to act. To be at Gilgal is to remember that "God hath chosen the foolish things . . . and the weak things . . . and the base things . . . and the things which are despised."

Then we can know something of Mizpeh (watch tower), and hear what God the Lord will speak, for if

we are in the truth of Bethel and Gilgal we are prepared to learn God's mind, and to understand His ways. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Lastly, it is interesting to notice what is recorded in the closing verse of our chapter.

"And his (Samuel's) return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the Lord."

We now, so to speak, come to Samuel's *private* life. Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh are all, more or less, connected with Israel's history as a nation, and have more or less of a public character. The lesson is that the public and the private must be in accord. What we are individually and privately must answer to the profession we make publicly. Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpeh must find their answer in Ramah. The contrary must also be true. There are some excellent people whose private lives are irreproachable, but who seem little concerned as to their public testimony. They apply, in a measure, the word of God to their private conduct, but beyond this they are content to fall in with almost anything that is going. Both spheres ought to be a matter of deep concern to us, and should be in agreement.

We have dwelt upon the significance of Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpeh—places associated with the public history of God's people—but let us not forget the other side. Some might have been saved from grievous failure and even shipwreck, had they been true to their public profession, and had their secret life fully corresponded to what they appeared to be before men; and, contrariwise, others might have glorified God infinitely more had they, in addition to living a consistent life as individual Christians, not forgotten the truth of Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpeh.

Samuel's return was to Ramah: for there was his house. He dwelt on high—the place of prayer and



communion—for Ramah means height, loftiness. How often in Scripture a mountain is associated with these two things—prayer and communion. Moses stood on the top of the hill when he prayed for Israel (Exod. xvii. 9-12), and how often our Lord sought the solitude and repose of some mountain top. Yes, our *return* must be to Ramah, and our houses must witness to our intercourse with God, and we must dwell in an atmosphere of prayer, or Bethel and Gilgal will become to us but names, and may even become snares, just as they did to Israel. (See Amos v. 4-6.) We must take care that there is no glaring discrepancy between what God sees us to be publicly in His house, and what He sees us to be in our own.

“And there he judged Israel.” We must be right in our intercourse with men, and in our dealings with them. Does our business, and do our daily employments, witness to the Divine influence of Bethel and Gilgal? Here it is we are tested. In vain is it for us to talk of Bethel, if any reproach rests upon us in connection with our business relations and our home life. Let us cultivate a very tender conscience in these matters. “Herein do I exercise myself,” said the Apostle, “to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men” (Acts xxiv. 16).

And now we come to the last reference to Samuel in this connection: “And there he built an altar unto the Lord.” Thus we learn that Samuel was not only right as to the whole circuit of his public career and administration, and in his private life as well, but also as regards his individual communion with God. Every outgoing of our lives must be fed from that spring. Apart from it, all will become more or less barren and unprofitable. Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpeh found their counter-part in his family relations, in his intercourse with his fellow men, and also in his individual communion with God. The reference to his sons in the succeeding chapter may seem to detract from all this, but it is to be noticed that it is made without

any comment, so far as Samuel is concerned, and no reflection is cast upon him, as in the case of Eli. The fact that they did not walk in the ways of their father is sad enough, but it is not explained. Sainly men have sometimes had degenerate sons in spite of careful training. Parents are not always to blame. In this case we are happy in being able to leave this sad fact, where Scripture leaves it, in silence; and instead, to contemplate the yearly circuit of this holy man to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpeh, and then all that was in keeping with it, his return to Ramah—" *there* was his house; and *there* he judged Israel; and *there* he built an altar unto the Lord." The Cross must never be far from our thoughts, if we are to maintain communion with God.

What has all this to say to us? As we contemplate the state of the times in which we live, and perhaps our own state, does it cause lamentation, do we long for more of God, for greater manifestations of His power and presence? And are we willing to go through the process which is to secure this? To take our place before Him in weakness and nothingness, and in confession, prepared to put away every hindrance and to serve Him only? Do Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpeh, with what they stand for, find their place within the circuit of our lives, and is our private life in keeping with these hallowed associations? The lessons we have sought to draw from this Scripture indicate the way, and, we believe, the only way, in which revival can come to our own souls; and then, perhaps, through God's unspeakable mercy, to the souls of others.

## THE TOP OF THE HILL <sup>1</sup>

(Abridged)

NUMBERS xxi.

THIS chapter leads us to "the top of the hill"—to Pisgah's summit (*v.* 20).<sup>2</sup> From that eminence Moses surveyed the promised land. The Apostle Paul was on "the top of the hill" when he wrote the eighth chapter of Romans. It is the place for every child of God. Our study of the chapter before us will indicate how it may be reached.

The chapter begins with the account of the brazen serpent. This is one of those figures or types which point to the death of Christ. We are left in no doubt as to this by our Lord's words in John iii. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (*v.* 14). The brazen serpent therefore gives us one aspect of the Cross.

There are two other types which precede this, and which prepare us for the truth which underlies this third aspect. We refer to Exodus xii. and xiv.

In Exodus xii., where God is about to execute judgment upon Egypt and deliver His people, the question raised is—How can God *righteously* make a difference between the two? The slain lamb and the blood on the lintel is the answer. It is God's own answer. No one else could furnish a reason. God alone could settle matters with Himself, so that while acting in mercy He could still be righteous.

<sup>1</sup> The original, in separate form, is still procurable. Price 2*d.* or 1*s.* 8*d.* per dozen, post free.

<sup>2</sup> See marginal rendering.

The doctrine of this is found in the third chapter of Romans. The Apostle shows that all are guilty, all subject to God's judgment, every mouth stopped. But God's righteousness is seen in the blood of Jesus. "To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (v. 26). Just and yet the justifier. Could there be a more wonderful conjunction? Not pitiful, or merciful, or even loving—though love is at the back of it all—but *just*. God's very *justice* enables Him to pardon the one who believes in Jesus.

### The Red Sea

When we come to Exodus xiv. an entirely different question is raised. It is no longer a question between God and Israel, but between God and their enemies. So we read: "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day *out of the hand of the Egyptians*" (not from His judgment), "and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did *upon the Egyptians*; and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and His servant Moses" (vv. 30-1).

The New Testament doctrine which corresponds with this is found in Romans iv. 25: "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." What peace the Israelites enjoyed when they saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore! In Exodus xii. it was what God saw—"When I see the blood I will pass over *you*." Here it is what Israel saw. They saw their enemies dead. They saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians. By faith we see a greater work, and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so these two incidents in Israel's history present to us two stupendous facts, which are the basis of our forgiveness and our peace, and the means of our salvation—God's righteousness and God's power. Exodus xii. gives us the first, and Exodus xiv. gives us the second.

And so we are placed beyond the reach of the enemy, and we sing. Just as Israel sang, "The Lord hath triumphed gloriously," and anticipated their entry into the promised land, and the accomplishment of all His purposes, so with ourselves, as is said in Romans v. 2, "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

### The Enemy Within

But soon the song dies away, and we hear another sound. These same children of Israel murmur against the very God Who had wrought so mightily on their behalf. See Exodus xvi. 2. There is an enemy *within*. And that enemy is more deadly, and harder to deal with, than any external foe. "The minding of the flesh is enmity against God." There is that within us, even though we are converted, which resists God, which lusts against the Holy Spirit, and is the enemy of our own happiness and spiritual prosperity. The children of Israel, in spite of all they had tasted of God's goodness, and seen of His power, are ready to murmur against Him. It is the flesh—sin in the flesh—which is the evil root from which all such conduct springs; and that flesh is in every child of God, and will be until he departs hence.

But is there no deliverance from this enemy? The Brazen Serpent is the answer. And we now turn to consider this aspect of the death of Christ. The question here is not, How can God righteously shelter us from His judgment? (Exod. xii.), nor how can he place us beyond the reach of all our foes (Exod. xiv). But how can I find deliverance from the law of sin in my members? In other words, it is not Romans iii., nor Romans iv. and v., but Romans vi. and vii. and beginning of chapter viii.

A very solemn lesson confronts us at the beginning of Numbers xxi. We are not here at the commencement of Israel's wanderings, but at the end. They have had forty years' experience in the wilderness of God's care and goodness and provision for them, yet the evil

nature within them is unchanged. Nay, if possible, it manifests itself in a worse form. Could any words declare more plainly the character of the flesh than those we find at the end of verse 5, "Our soul *loatheth* this light bread"? Not merely "*tired* of this light bread," but "our soul *loatheth*" it. Hatred and detestation seem to lurk beneath that word. Reader, you and I have the same evil hearts. By nature there is in every one of us an utter want of appreciation of God's beloved Son. We have to arrive at the same conclusion as the Apostle Paul when he said, "I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. vii. 14).

To show how completely, in figure, man after the flesh had failed, and how distinctly the brazen serpent points to the end of one order and the beginning of another, we must read Numbers xxi. in the light of chapter xx. There we see the complete breakdown in the hands of Moses and Aaron of the system God had established under law for the blessing of His people. Before the chapter closes we see Aaron, the representative of the people, stripped of his official robes, and we read, "Aaron died there in the top of the mount." And although Moses, who was God's representative, does not die immediately, yet he is shut out of the land for the same reason that occasioned Aaron's death.

### A New Life

We see then how something completely new is inaugurated in connection with the brazen serpent. If we are to find deliverance from the bondage of sin in the flesh, it is of the utmost importance to apprehend the truth of Numbers xxi. and to notice carefully the instructions given by God to Moses with reference to the brazen serpent. Man after the flesh must go, and a new man be introduced.

The people asked Moses to pray unto the Lord to take away the serpents. The significant words are added, "Moses prayed for the people." How often we are inclined to pray for our *circumstances* to be

altered when what we really need is to pray that *we* may be altered. Merely to take away the serpents would have left the people as they were. Nor did God put a pole in their hand with which to smite the serpents. Nor give them ointment to soothe the pain and heal their wounds. To read some books on holiness we would suppose this is what He did do. The instructions were :

“Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole ; and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it shall live.”

And we are told :

“Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived.”

There is one important distinction between these two statements we need to notice. In the first, what Moses made is called “a *fiery* serpent,” in the second, “a serpent of *brass*.” Here we have a double truth. The term “a *fiery* serpent” indicates that the serpent was in the likeness of the actual serpents by which the Israelites were bitten ; while “a serpent of *brass*” speaks of judgment. These two ideas are combined in one verse in Romans viii., in the words of verse 3, where we read, “God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (the “*fiery*” serpent) ; “and by a sacrifice for sin (margin) condemned sin in the flesh” (the serpent of “*brass*”).

It is as we find life by looking away to Another that deliverance from all the effects of sin is known. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John iii. 14-15).

Let us briefly consider this most vital subject, first, in the light of Romans vii. and viii., and then of John iii.

Romans vii. carries us a step farther than Romans vi.

Here it is not merely a question of sin but of *ourselves*, and of ourselves not merely as regards sin, but the law. This finds expression in the language of verse 23. "I delight in the law of God after the *inward* man; but I see another law (or principle) in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity." So that he has to confess, "The good that I would, I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do." And so the real problem here is, as he says, "How to *perform* that which is *good*." Not merely what is my relation to sin, as in Romans vi., but can I do the good? Or, in other words, can a person of himself, even though a converted person, bring forth fruit unto God? And the conclusion arrived at is, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) good does not dwell." And this sense of utter inability to overcome the evil tendencies within him, and do what he really wants to do, and knows he ought to do, leads at last to the cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

Does not this bring us to the very same point as Numbers xxi. in connection with the brazen serpent? Can we not imagine a bitten Israelite uttering the same cry, as he felt the poison from the serpent's bite working in him? And the remedy is the same in both cases. Just as the bitten Israelite found deliverance by looking away to an object entirely outside himself, so with the Apostle in Romans vii. His cry is, "*Who shall deliver me?*" and the moment he utters this cry his deliverance comes, and as speedily as it did in the other case. "I thank God," he says, "I am delivered (for this is the force of it) through Jesus Christ our Lord."

### Romans viii.

The first three verses of Romans viii. tell us what this deliverance means and how it is effected. Here we have the truth of the brazen serpent explained. We have seen in Numbers xxi. that the brazen serpent is intro-



duced in connection with the words, "Our soul loatheth this light bread." That statement reveals what the flesh is. Nothing short of a new life will meet the case. And what the type reveals is that that life must be found in Another. In one who bears the judgment of the old and brings it to an end before God. This is exactly what we have in Romans viii. 3.

"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin (that is, by a sacrifice for sin), condemned sin in the flesh."

"What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh." We have seen all its *weakness* in considering Romans vii. But Romans viii. 3 brings us to the Cross, and in that Cross we see sin in the flesh condemned. We have to accept that condemnation, and henceforth, turning altogether from the flesh, live by Christ.

Let us then look right away to Him Who is our life, as the bitten Israelite looked right away from himself to the serpent lifted up, and, as a result, the Holy Spirit will be able to accomplish His own blessed work in us and we shall be able to say, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath set me free from the principle of sin and death."

And Who is that One in whom we now live and with whom we are linked for ever? John iii. 13-14 will tell us.

"No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven."

Our life is linked with another Man. One apart and different from every other. "No man hath ascended up to heaven." That is, no man as such—the man of the earth. By nature we belonged to that order of man. He has no place in heaven. We now belong to the One Who came down from heaven; the One in heaven. This was true of Him even when on earth. That One was lifted up. That One bore our judgment.

That One took all that belongs to us, that we might have all that belongs to Him. That One is now our life. We can form no proper estimate of what that life means, unless we behold Him, and we cannot know the full blessedness of it unless we *continue* to behold Him. He is it.

And this brings us to the wondrous statement of John iii. 16, "God so loved the world." The Cross is the revelation of the love of God. Only that Person, the Son of Man in heaven—the only begotten Son—and only that One dying for us and bearing the judgment which was our due because of all we were, could reveal the depths of the heart of God. He has brought all the love of God to us.

### The New Start

Returning now to Numbers xxi., verse 10, we see that just as Exodus xii. and xiv. meant a new beginning for the children of Israel, so the brazen serpent marks a new beginning in their history. The first words we read are, "The children of Israel set forward."

From this point we shall notice, as we proceed, an uninterrupted advance is recorded, until the "top of the hill" is reached, in verse 20. And the various incidents mentioned between verses 10 and 20 throw much light upon the Christian's progress, and show us the steps by which we, too, may reach the same spiritual elevation.

Verse 10 gives us a double aspect of Christian experience. The children of Israel not only "set forward," but, we are told, they "pitched."

Sometimes God seems to bring us to a standstill. Some barrier may seem across our path; or, on the other hand, we may be incapacitated, by illness or accident, so that we cannot advance farther. Obstacles or enemies may also, at times, seem to block the way. In all such cases, with every true child of God, he or she may be perfectly sure that there is a wise purpose in this, and that the seeming lost time is really a prepara-

tion for higher service, or for a fuller revelation of God to the soul, which will make their spiritual experience richer and their life more fruitful. Illustrations of this will be found in Abraham's history (Gen. xxi. 34 in relation to chap. xxii.) and in the experience of Peter (Acts ix. 43 in relation to chap x.).

### The Sunrising

The next incident is one of supreme interest. It is recorded in verse 11 that they pitched "in the wilderness which is before Moab ; *toward the sunrising.*"

Scripture constantly reminds us of the prospect before us—a new day, a morning without clouds ; it tells us that " the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in His wings." Our faces are toward the *sunrising*. Is this always in view ? Would it not make a tremendous difference both to our happiness and spiritual condition, if it were ?

King David lived and died with the *sunrising* ever before him. His last words refer to it. His thoughts dwell upon " the everlasting covenant " God had made with him, " ordered in all things and sure," and upon Christ in Whom alone, he knew, all would be accomplished ; and he can say, " He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds." And he adds, " This is all my salvation and all my desire."

The Old Testament closes on the same note, and so does the New. Has not God, then, set our faces " toward the sunrising " ? Where can we turn with any hope to-day, with clouds gathering on every hand, but to Him Who is coming, and Who alone can introduce a better and brighter day ? " Unto you that fear my Name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings." And how does revelation close, but by leaving us in the presence of that same One and the prospect of His immediate return, but telling us Who that One is—" *I Jesus. . . . I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and Morning Star.*"

And does not Paul exhort us to have our faces toward the sunrising? "Now is our salvation nearer," he declares, "than when we believed. The night is far spent, the *day* is at hand."

### The Springing Well

From "sunrising" we pass to the "Springing Well" and to singing. Verses 16-18 give us a unique spiritual experience. We will quote the words:

"And from thence they went to Beer; that is the well whereof the Lord spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water.

"Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it, the princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves."

There had been no singing, as far as we know, for forty years. At least, there is no record of it. God had been compelled to listen to their murmurs, again and again, but no song had issued from their lips. We see, then, what a new order of things is introduced as the result of the brazen serpent. There is no singing in Romans vii., only the sighing at felt weakness, and at last, the outcry, "O wretched man that I am." The springing well indicates the power and energy of the Spirit working in us, and this can only be as the flesh is refused and Christ is enthroned.

In connection with the brazen serpent we referred to John iii. But the springing well suggests John iv.

First of all, the well had to be *digged*. "The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver." In John iv. we see the Lord digging the well. He had spoken to the woman of "the living water" He was prepared to give, and He had uttered these wonderful words: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." This seems to offer to the woman such a relief from toil and trouble that she exclaims, "Sir, give me this

water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." She saw nothing beyond what was natural and what would minister to herself. Had the Lord bestowed the water then, she could never have appreciated it or even profited by it. The well must be digged, otherwise all would be worse than wasted, and He begins to dig it. "Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither."

When our Lord said to the woman, "I that speak unto thee am He," she left her waterpot; for the "living water," as far as it could be known then, had become hers. Christ was revealed to her, and she responded.

### The Top of the Hill

And this leads us to the climax. In verse 20 we find Israel at the top of Pisgah (margin, "the hill"). What associations gather round this summit! Here Moses stood and surveyed the promised land, just ere he died. We learn from Deuteronomy xxxiv. 1 that Pisgah was one of the highest parts of Mount Nebo, or perhaps the highest. At all events, what we gather from this incident is that from this vantage point Moses surveyed the land and entered into God's purpose for His people.

It is well for us if, as Christians, we know the meaning of "the top of the hill." In connection with the brazen serpent, we thought of Romans vii. The top of the hill brings us to Romans viii. It is our privilege to take our stand there and survey the scene. How vast is its extent! How glorious is the prospect which seems to open out before the Apostle Paul as he surveys it!

From the top of the hill he sees himself "in Christ." There is no condemnation. And he tells us the minding of the Spirit is "*life and peace.*" Two things are noticed as we climb a hill. We leave behind us the sounds and sights of the valley, and we breathe a more invigorating atmosphere. So on the hill-top of Romans viii. we find "life and peace."

On that hill-top all is serene, for God is very near,

and, as the Apostle says, "We cry, Abba, Father." There is nothing between us and our Father's face. In Switzerland once we were staying 5,000 feet up and had the unique experience of being above the clouds all day long. It was not that there were no clouds, but they were like rolling waves of the sea at our feet. Down below in the valley it was raining. So we heard afterwards from a friend who left us on that particular day. For us there was the dazzling sun and the unclouded blue. And what a view we had of almost the entire range of the Bernese Oberland, peak after peak, stretching away in the distance.

But that is nothing compared with what the Apostle sees from his elevation, where no cloud obscures his vision. We are not only children of God, but heirs, and joint heirs with Christ, to be glorified together. His eye catches a glimpse of the glory to be revealed to us, and of the coming manifestation of the Sons of God. In expectation he views all this lower creation delivered from the bondage of corruption to share the liberty of the children of God. A groaning and travailing creation will groan no longer. What a prospect !

And so the Apostle seems to pass beyond all horizons and all vistas, and he sees a pathway up to God. And beyond everything that can be known or thought of ; beyond and behind everything that has ever been experienced in this life of tribulation and distress, persecution and famine ; beyond life itself and beyond death, beyond even angels and principalities and powers, and things present or things to come, compassing all height and depth and every created thing, is the love from which nothing can separate us--the love of Christ Who died for us, and of God Who gave Him.