



CHRIST CONTEMPLATED

AND APPREHENDED.

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IN the narrative of the man mentioned in John ix. is set forth the history of a soul on its journey from darkness to light; from the point at which it gets its need met by Jesus, to the knowledge of the Son of God. The man had received sight through washing at Siloam at the bidding of Jesus, and was then led on, by divine teaching, in the apprehension of his Benefactor, to know Him finally as the Son of God, and to find himself at His blessed feet. In the history of this man we get a picture of our own if we would make progress and come to the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man; for like him we must apprehend Christ step by step, and be led on stage by stage in the knowledge of Himself.

We see that at first he apprehended Christ as "*a man that is called Jesus.*" To his neighbours, who had noticed a change in him, and had asked him how his eyes were opened, he replied: "A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight." The man was certain as to what he had received and through whom he had received it. He had not yet seen Jesus, nor did he know where He was, but his need had been met by the One who had drawn near to him in grace—Jesus the Saviour—then, as he contemplated the greatness of His work in giving him sight, his apprehension of Jesus deepened, and his knowledge of Him increased until he was given the unspeakable joy of knowing Him as the Son of God. But he was not brought to this full knowledge in a moment, but step by step.

Then his neighbours bring him to the Pharisees, who asked him how he had received sight, and his answer to them is, "He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see." The Pharisees tell him that Jesus is not of God because He did not keep the sabbath. They could complain of Christ breaking the sabbath, as they thought, little knowing that He represented God's covenant, and that they had rejected Him, while at the same time they were endeavouring to enforce the keeping of that which was the sign of the covenant between God and His people. They then asked the man, "What sayest thou of him?" His reply was, "*He is a prophet.*" In this answer we learn that he had contemplated Christ in the light in which he had at first apprehended Him and had received more light. He apprehends Him now as a prophet—One whom God had sent, and who, in telling him to go to the pool of Siloam to wash, had

spoken to him the word of God. He now traced the receiving of his sight to God, and discerned that Jesus was the One who had brought the blessing to him. I need not say that his apprehension of Jesus as a prophet was an advance on his first knowledge of Him. At first, to him, He was a "man called Jesus;" now he links Jesus with God, and declares that He is a prophet, One whom God had sent.

But there was still more light in store for him, as the deeper darkness blinded the minds of his opposers, who said: "Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner." They were willing to acknowledge that God had opened the man's eyes, but refused the thought of Jesus having had anything to do in the matter. In their estimation Moses was far greater than Christ, and they confess that they do not know from whence He is, which brings from the man the retort: "Why herein is a

marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes." In this statement to them we see that, since their last interview with him, he had received further light as to Christ. Then he said, "He is a prophet"—One whom God had sent, and through whom God had spoken to him—now he apprehends Him to be "*of God*," and confessed: "*He hath opened mine eyes.*" A further knowledge of Christ had now broken in upon his soul, and he apprehended Jesus to be the giver of his sight, and discerned that He had done that which none but God could do; therefore he said: "If this man were not *of God*, he could do nothing."

But the more the man entered into the light as to Christ, the greater the distance became between him and his opposers. As the eyes of his heart were being opened by divine teaching to greater and yet greater glories in Jesus, the eyes of the Jews

became more and more blind as to Him. They talked about God, but of Jesus they knew nothing, consequently they could not really know God, nor could they tolerate in their company the man that was becoming more and more attracted by and attached to Christ; they cast him out.

Jesus had been rejected by them before, now this, His sheep, is cast out with Him. What a moment of supreme blessing to the excommunicated one! Cast out of the synagogue, he is cast into the arms of the Son of God! Turned out of the fold, he is free to enter the flock! Refused their company, he finds himself in the company of the Shepherd of the sheep! Outside of man and a religion that had become human, the man was found by Jesus for the second time, who said to him: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" He replied, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" Jesus said: "Thou hast both seen him, and it is

he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him."

The man first apprehended Christ as *a man that is called Jesus*; then as *a prophet*; then as *being of God*; and finally, as *the Son of God*.

I think the journey of this soul in the apprehension of Christ should be very helpful to us all. And to the end that we might travel the same road and reach the same blessed goal, let us apply to ourselves the lesson we have been considering. The history of the man and the way he made progress is especially interesting to us, for we have the same divine Teacher who instructed him, and have also helps to our apprehension of Christ that he had not. In the first place, the divine Teacher, who was instructing him, has now come down to dwell within us—to testify of Jesus, and to be the "unction" whereby we know all things. In the next place we have to-day a living

ministry in the church through the gifts that Christ has given. And finally, we have the scriptures which testify of Him. The man had no human ministry, and apparently no knowledge of scripture, yet he was most blessedly taught of the Spirit and led step by step into a fuller and deeper apprehension of Christ. He had opposition to the full, but the opposition only helped to keep him contemplating the One who had ministered to him in His grace, and thereby, instead of being a hindrance, became a real help to him by the Spirit of God.

I suppose, when we at first received relief, we were much in the same condition as this man after he had received sight. Our need had been met, but we knew very little of Him through whom the relief had come, and we had a very vague knowledge of where He is. The Saviour had come to us, and we knew Him as Jesus who saves His people from

their sins, the One in whose name repentance and remission of sins is preached, and through whose name we had been forgiven.

From this point it is the Spirit's work to lead us on to apprehend the One through whom we have received the blessing, to the end that growing in and by the knowledge of Him we may be led on to know Him as the Son of God, and be brought into moral correspondence with Him.

But the question may be asked, How is our apprehension of Christ to be enlarged? How is our knowledge of Him to be increased? I think we may find the answer in the history of the man we have been considering, which is this: he contemplated Christ, and kept Him before his mind and heart, according to the light in which he knew Him, and God gave him further light. The great lack in the Lord's people to-day is that of contemplation. The Apostle Paul writing to Timothy said:

“Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.” If we do the considering, we may be sure that the Lord will give the understanding. If we consider Him, we shall get to know Him more perfectly. If we are much in contemplation of Him according to the revelation of Himself that we have received, we shall be given to see greater glories in His face, and be more deeply affected by what we discern in Him; our worship, our walk, and our work will become characterised by and take their colour from our knowledge of Himself.

On God's side, that is, on the side of *revelation*, all is divinely perfect, for He has fully revealed Himself in His Son, and is now in the light of that revelation. On our side, that of *apprehension*, there may be great feebleness, and at most we only apprehend in part. The revelation does not affect us until we apprehend what is revealed. The sun may

shine, but if our eyes are not opened, the sun will shine for us in vain. The work of Christ in revealing God to us is complete. The work of the Spirit in giving us to apprehend, by faith, God as He has been revealed in His Son is progressive, and much depends upon our state of soul. There may be the most perfect knowledge of the letter of scripture, or a clear and concise knowledge of doctrine, but if a personal knowledge of Christ is lacking, we are most assuredly deficient in that which is most vital, for to arrive at the knowledge of the Son of God is to arrive at the full-grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Remember, if we are not growing in our apprehension of Christ, we are not growing at all, for there is no other way of increase, no other way by which we can become enlarged. As we apprehend Him we get to know Him; and as we know Him,

He becomes formed in us by the Spirit and we become *of Him*. Be assured of this, that the measure in which we *contemplate* Him is the measure in which we shall *apprehend* Him. If we would know Him better we must consider Him more.

As we do this, the Spirit will give us to know Him as the One whom God has sent into the world that we might live through Him, and be led to know Him as a Man of an entirely new order, a divine Man, One over whom death had no power; a Man risen from the dead, who is the source and pattern; the sun and centre of God's world, the One in whom all the promises of God are verified and will be fulfilled, the Son of God in whom all things shall be headed up to the glory of God, and who will fill all in the universe of bliss with His own character; the One to whose image we shall shortly be conformed, to the end that He may surround Himself with His

many brethren in the day of His glory.

May we be much in the contemplation of Christ, so that we may apprehend Him better and discern more clearly the moral glories that are inherent in Himself, and better know the official glories that are given to Him of God, so that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

E. W.

