

TRUTH *for the* LAST DAYS

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The Path of Life
and Separation.

BY
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THE PATH OF LIFE.

Psalm XVI.

IT has been truly said there was no path in the garden of Eden. An innocent man in a garden of delights had only to remain where God had placed him. He needed no path to lead him out of such a scene. Then again there will be no path in heaven. A holy man in a perfect scene will have no desire to leave it. We shall need no path in heaven.

In a ruined world there is, and of necessity must be, a path through it, and out of it; for in such a world none can stay. The guilty man cannot stay, the godly man would not if he could. From the gates of Eden man became a wanderer in a fallen world—a sinner who, from the moment he enters the world, treads a path that leads out of the world by death—*the path of death.*

For the believer, however, there is another path—*the path of life.* “A path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen: the lion’s whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it” (Job xxviii. 7, 8). It lies beyond the range of

nature's keenest vision, and nature's greatest strength. The wit of man has never discovered it, and the might of man will never tread it. Like the path of death it passes through a world of sorrow, yea through the valley of the shadow of death, but, unlike the path of death, it leads into the presence of the LORD where there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

This path, which could never be discovered by nature, has been disclosed by grace, and trodden in perfection by a perfect Man—the Man Christ Jesus. There has been One here to whom, by reason of His intrinsic perfection, the path of life could be disclosed. The Lord Jesus can say, "Thou wilt show *Me* the the path of life;" and every step of that path He has trodden in perfection, and reached the goal at the right hand of God. Moreover in treading the path He becomes the perfect example for His people, and sets their feet in the path that He has trodden, for His last words ere He left this scene were "Follow Me." We indeed may tread this path with faltering steps and many a stumble, but, as our pattern, and for our encouragement, Christ has gone before us in the path.

The Lord is Himself gone before;
He has mark'd out the path that we tread;
It's as sure as the love we adore,
We have nothing to fear nor to dread.

It is this path that is so blessedly traced for us in the sixteenth Psalm. Seeing the path trodden by Christ in perfection we cannot but admire it; and what we admire we imitate.

Before we seek to trace the blessedness of this path, let us ask ourselves "What is the life to which the Lord refers when He speaks of the path of *life*?" There is the common round of life with all its varied duties and relationships—a life which is enacted on earth, bounded by time and ended by death. There is too the life of service and conflict with the enemy; but this again is limited to an earthly sphere. The "life" of which the Lord speaks is not confined to earth, limited to time, or touched by death. It is *the inner life lived with God and before God*. A "life" indeed that is lived on earth, that sustains the soul in its passage through time and death, that is enjoyed in fulness at the right hand of God, and endures for evermore. It is this life that is so blessedly set before us in the Sixteenth Psalm. Being the "inner life" of communion with God, it is a life that is independent of circumstances, though sustaining us in circumstances. For this reason adverse circumstances have little place in the Psalm. They are recognised, for a godless world, death and the grave are mentioned, but only as the dark background of a life which can be lived untouched by evil in a world of evil.

Who could overrate the blessedness of such a life: as one has said, "This living relationship with God casts a light, a halo on all; it lights the soul up with such a direct consciousness of divine blessing that nothing is like it, save the full realization of it in the presence of God. A man with God, enjoying Him in a nature capable of doing so with all the necessary result where it shall be fulfilled without a cloud—a man as Christ was in this world with God—is the most

perfect joy possible, save the everlasting fulfilment of all known and felt in it."

How true this is and yet how easily we may neglect this "inner life." Assured of our standing before God we may be careful that the outward life shall be correct before men, and maintain activity in service, while little exercised as to the inner life before God. Let us however remember that right walk before men as well as true service for Christ, is the outcome of the life lived before God.

With these introductory remarks let us pass on to consider this "inner life" as set forth in Christ. Twice in the New Testament the Psalm is applied to Christ. The Apostle Peter quotes verses 8-11 to prove the resurrection of Christ (Acts ii. 25-28): and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews applies the principle of the first verse (if not directly quoting it) to prove the participation of Christ in human nature (Heb. ii. 13). Thus we have the warrant of Scripture for applying the Psalm to Christ personally.

I.

CHRIST THE DEPENDENT MAN.

THE Psalm opens by presenting Christ as the perfectly dependent Man. "Preserve Me, O God," is the language of *dependence*. The first great principle of the inner life lived before God is dependence. It is natural for man to be dependent upon his God, nevertheless fallen man would rather

be dependent upon anything and anyone but God. In Christ there was found at last upon earth a Man who was wholly dependent upon the power of God to preserve Him at every step of His path. He could indeed have preserved Himself; nevertheless in grace He takes a place as the dependent Man. "We understand dependence on God when we are in a strait, but dependence upon God pure and simple when we have resources in our possession is little known. All the resources of creation were at His command, all the host of heaven were ready to do His bidding when He said, 'Preserve Me, O God.'"

II.

CHRIST THE CONFIDING MAN.

IN Thee do I put my trust" is the language of *confidence*. Christ's perfect dependence upon God was the outcome of His perfect confidence in God. He had unbounded confidence in boundless love. The storm that the devil raised found Christ in calm sleep with His head on a pillow. The real pillow of His heart was the Father's love. As the perfect Man He can say "In Thee do I put my trust," and sleep in the storm; then as the mighty God He rises up, saying, "Peace be still" and calms the storm. It has been truly said "The storms drive *us home*, but the storm found Him *at home*." The storms that send us to the Father found Him with the Father. Nothing ever moved Him from dependence upon the Father's power, and confidence in the Father's love. He has

gone, but He has left His pillow behind Him, for the Father's love is our portion.

III.

CHRIST THE SUBJECT MAN.

A THIRD great characteristic of the inner life comes before us in the second verse. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, thou art my Lord." This is the expression of One who takes the place of *subjection* and obedience to the will of another. A life of absolute subjection to the sovereign will of God at all times is an intolerable thought to the natural man, yet this is the path of life and joy. To do the will of One whose infinite love has purposed me for eternal blessing, and whose divine power and wisdom is carrying out His purposes, must be the way of blessing. This path of subjection to the will of Another has been trodden in perfection by Christ as Man. Coming into the world He could say, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O my God:" passing through it He could say, "I do always those things that please Him:" passing out of it He could say, "Not my will but thine be done." There has been One here who, in all circumstances, and at all times—moment by moment—did nothing but the will of God.

When the storm of opposition was rising on every hand He can say, "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." The clouds that thickened round

His path ever found Him confiding in the Father's love and subject to the Father's will. And when that greatest of all storms—the storm that was over our heads—was about to burst on His head, He is still confiding in the Father's love, for He can say, "The cup which my Father hath given Me shall I not drink it:" and still subject to the Father's will, for He adds, "Not my will but thine be done."

In the 2nd Psalm Christ is the Subjugator who will put down all insubjection with a rod of iron. Blessed it is to know that One is coming who will deal with all the lawlessness of the world and bring all into subjection to the will of God. This however is not wonderful when we remember who He is—God's anointed King.

In the 8th Psalm we are carried on to a time when the whole creation is brought into subjection to Christ, as we read, "Thou hast put all things under His feet." Blessed indeed will this be, but again we say hardly wonderful when we remember who He is—the Son of Man crowned with glory and honour.

10 When, however, we come to the 16th Psalm, we learn that the One who will *subjugate* everything to God, to whom all is to be put into *subjection*, has Himself been the perfectly *subject* Man. This indeed is a wonder for our souls to contemplate; and yet, may we not say that His power to subject the whole universe to Himself lies in the fact that He, Himself, was once the perfectly subject Man.

Thus the opening verses of the Psalm present these three great characteristics of the path of life—dependence upon the power of God, confidence in the love of God and subjection to the will of God.

IV.

CHRIST THE LOWLY MAN.

ANOTHER beautiful characteristic of the path of life, perfectly exemplified in the life of Christ, is its *lowliness*. Speaking as a Man Christ could say to God, "My goodness extendeth not to Thee;" speaking of the saints that are on the earth—the excellent—He could say, "In them is all my delight" (N. Tr.). The saints and the excellent of the earth are not often found among "the princes of this world." We do well to remember the words of the Apostle to the carnally minded Corinthians, "Ye see your calling brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the foolish . . . the weak . . . the base . . . and the things which are despised." It is among such that "the excellent" will be found, and it was with such that the Lord, in His lowly grace, identified Himself. If we would have the company of Christ we must also have the company of the lowly of this world, for it is with them He will be found. If Simon the Pharisee invites the Lord of glory to his house he finds that he must also have the company of the woman of the city. Nor was it simply that Christ

associated with the lowly, but He delighted in them. His was the lowly mind. He could say "I am meek and *lowly in heart*." It was not only lowliness of manner or lowliness of speech—which indeed we can easily affect—it was lowliness of heart. The word for our guidance is, "Let this *mind* be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus;" and again, "in lowliness of *mind* let each esteem others better than themselves."

V.

CHRIST THE SEPARATE MAN.

IN the pathway of Christ as the perfect Man, He would allow nothing to come in between His soul and God. He would pay no homage to the objects which men worship, nor take up their names upon His lips. An idol is not necessarily an actual image that is worshipped in place of the true God. It is anything that is allowed to come, as an object of the heart's affections between the soul and God; hence, even to believers, the Apostle can write, "Little children keep yourselves from idols." Alas how often we turn aside to pursue objects that come between our souls and God, only to find the truth of the Psalmist's words, "Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another." It has been said that an innocent man had no object, he simply had to enjoy God's goodness: a fallen man has many objects which separate the heart from God; but the new man has one Object, "For me to live is Christ," and again,

“The life which I now live . . . I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

VI.

CHRIST THE SATISFIED MAN.

NOT only was Christ the separate Man, He was the perfectly *satisfied* Man. He could say, “The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup.” The inheritance is that to which we are traveling on—the permanent portion of the soul; the cup is rather what is enjoyed by the way. The inheritance is ours by title, the cup is the measure of present enjoyment of the inheritance. The LORD is the portion of our inheritance and the LORD is the cup; thus the cup is not the enjoyment of circumstances by the way, but rather the enjoyment of the Lord in the circumstances. The circumstances may be sorrowful wilderness circumstances, as in the 23rd Psalm, and yet, says the Psalmist, “My cup runneth over.” The taste of the Lord that he had in the circumstances gave Him overflowing joy. Such, in perfection, was the experience of the Lord in the midst of the sorrows of His path. At the most sorrowful moment of His life, when rejected by Israel and misunderstood by His own, we read, “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth.” He was tasting of the cup by the way, while looking on to the inheritance of all things,

for He can add, All things are delivered unto Me of My Father."

It is ours to know we have a glorious inheritance, to taste the cup by the way, and realize that the inheritance is kept for us, "Thou maintainest my lot." To drink of this cup is to enter into the blessedness of the inheritance, and in so doing we are occupied with that which abides—that which will be maintained—in contrast to hastening after the things of a world which "passeth away and the lust thereof."

In passing through a world of death, the Lord, by reason of His circumstances, was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; but with the "goodly heritage" in view, He could say, "The lines have fallen unto Me in pleasant places."

VII.

CHRIST THE GUIDED MAN.

WE realize in deeper measure how perfectly Christ has entered into Manhood as we hear Him say, "I will bless the LORD, who hath *given me counsel.*" The One who gives divine counsel as God—whose name is Wonderful and Counsellor—is the One who received counsel as Man. No man, as such, is able in his own wisdom to take the path of life in a world of sin. At every step, amidst the confusions of

sin and self-will we need divine counsel. If, as the prophet says, we are to know how "to speak a word in season to him that is weary," we must have the ear opened "morning by morning" to hear as the learner." And this again is the language of the Lord. As Man He walked by the daily counsel of God. How necessary that we should be daily at His feet to hear His word.

Moreover there is not only divine counsel to guide, but also *spiritual intelligence* (Col. i. 9, 10). The "reins" would set forth this spiritual intelligence that forms the guiding principles of the soul. Such intelligence sees God's way with clearer vision when the soul is withdrawn from the influences of the busy world around, as in the retirement of the night seasons. Then indeed the spiritual intelligence, quickened by divine counsel, will see more clearly the path of life through a world of sin and death.

VIII.

CHRIST THE SUPPORTED MAN.

TO tread the path of life it is not enough to have divine counsel and spiritual intelligence, we also need *divine support*. This too is seen in perfection in the Lord's path as a Man. He could say, "I have set the LORD always before Me," and, having the LORD before Him, He was conscious of

the LORD *with Him*,—"He is at my right hand;" and with the LORD at His right hand, He can add, "I shall not be moved." It is our privilege to follow the Lord in this path, though He alone could say, "I have set the LORD *always* before Me." Alas it is not "always with us; we have not "always" the single eye that has no object but Christ. If it is not money or some gross object, it may be self in some form that we have before us. Self-ease, self-gratification or self-exaltation may obscure the vision of our souls; but when the eye is single—when Christ is the one object—then indeed we shall have the sense of the Lord's presence with us, and, when He is with us, we "shall not be moved." In the world around there may be a babel of contending voices, and amongst the people of God much confusion, but supported by the Lord we shall not be moved.

IX.

CHRIST THE REJOICING MAN.

THE path of life, trodden by the Lord, led through death. Not death as making atonement for His people, but as setting forth the blessedness of a life that death cannot touch. It is the path of life *through* death. Here the prospect of death raises no cloud upon His spirit. So far from being cast down at the thought of death, His heart is glad, His tongue rejoiceth, for His flesh will rest in hope. For the one

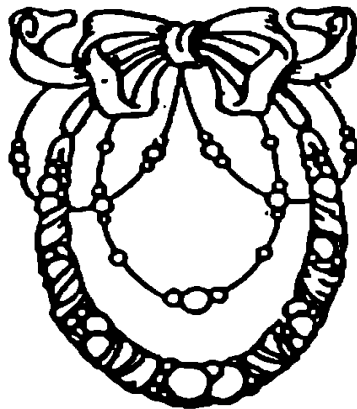
treading the path of life, death is but a means to the fuller enjoyment of the life. At the moment when the natural man treading the path of death is filled with gloom and apprehension the one treading the path of life is marked by joy, praise and the rest of hope.

The secret of this joy is found in having the glorious end in view. The path of life may pass through a world of sorrow, may lead through the valley of the shadow of death, but it ends at last in the presence of God. For Christ, and those that are Christ's, this indeed is the Father's presence. This is more than glory, it is the Father's house where the Father's heart is displayed and the Father Himself is fully known and enjoyed. Here amidst the sorrows of earth we may taste the cup of life, there amidst the joys of heaven we shall enter upon the fulness of life. Here there are pleasures by the way, there are found the pleasures for evermore.

Such was the inner life that the Lord as Man lived with God, and before God as He passed through this world. Such a life was unknown to an innocent man in Eden and impossible to a fallen man in the world. Only a holy Man passing through this world could live a life marked by *dependence* upon the power of God, *confidence* in the love of God and *subjection* to the will of God: a life of *lowliness* that associated with the morally excellent of the earth, while maintaining *separation* from the evil of the world: a life of *satisfaction* with the inheritance to come: a life in which there is divine *guidance* and divine *support*: a life which death cannot touch or the grave close, and

that leads to the presence of God where there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. A life counselled for us by the Father's heart, in which we have the support of the Father's hand, until at last we enter upon its fulness in the Father's home.

Only in Christ do we see the life lived in its absolute perfection. But the life lived in perfection by Christ is possible for His people in the power of the Holy Spirit.



THE PATH OF SEPARATION.

Matthew xiii. 53—xiv. 36.

IN this important passage the footsteps of the Lord lead us into the path of separation from a world that has rejected Christ. Four scenes pass before us—the country, the court, the desert and the stormy sea. Rejected by the world the Lord takes a place outside “His own country,” “His own house,” the king’s court, the peoples’ cities, and the disciples’ ship (xiii. 57, xiv. 13, 23). As we trace the Lord’s steps we learn the gain and blessedness of following the Lord into this path of separation.

In the first two scenes—the country and the court—we discover the true character of the world around us. In the last two scenes—the desert, and the sea—we discover the fulness of our resources in Christ in the outside place.

I. . .

HIS OWN COUNTRY—Matt. xiii. 53-58.

IN the fulfilment of His service of love the Lord had taken the lowest place and associated with the common people. He became poor that we through His poverty might be rich. Thus He is found again in “His own country” and among His own people in

despised Nazareth. Alas! even so these simple country folk are marked by the pride of the flesh that refuses to accept One who comes in lowly guise. They listen to His words of wisdom, and gaze with wonder at His works of power, but they say, "Is He not connected with the family of the carpenter? His mother, and brothers, and sisters are they not well known to us?" Social pride refuses to receive divine truths from One whose family is so low in the social scale; who is outside the circle of their religious officials, and comes to them without human credentials. He is rejected by "His own country" and "His own house."

II.

THE COURT OF THE KING—Matt. xiv. 1-12.

THE simple country people have rejected Christ, but what of the higher circles—what of the court of the king? It is true that Christ personally is not found in the court, but the treatment meted out to the Forerunner of Christ is a sure indication of the rejection of Christ Himself by the leaders of the people. In the court of Herod we get a true picture of this world, marked by corruption and violence. *The lust of the flesh* had led the ruler of the people into an infamous alliance with his brother Philip's wife. Unable to gainsay the rebukes of a godly man, and influenced by a wicked woman, he degrades justice by casting a righteous man into prison; and is only restrained from murder by the fear of the people. Then comes a day

when *the lust of the eye*, finding a passing gratification in the charms of a dancing girl, leads the frivolous king into a rash oath. Finally *the pride of life* leads him to commit murder to maintain his paltry ideas of honour.

Thus in these two scenes—one in “His own country,” the other in King Herod’s court—we have a complete picture of this present evil world, marked by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Moreover they present a twofold witness to the rejection of Christ. Neither country nor court will receive Christ, or any witness to Christ. All classes agree in rejecting One whose lowliness wounds their pride, and whose holiness opposes their lusts.

At different times the world may express itself in different forms, for the fashions of this world change, but at heart it is ever the same. The Lord was surrounded by the world of corrupt Judaism, we are faced with the world of corrupt Christendom. Outwardly there are differences, at heart they are alike marked by lust and pride, violence and corruption.

III.

THE DESERT PLACE—Matt. xiv. 13-21.

THE world depicted in the first two scenes cannot tolerate the presence of Christ, and is entirely unsuited to Christ. It rejects Christ and is rejected by Christ. The Lord accepts the murder of His Forerunner as the sure token of His own rejection,

and, leaving country and court, "He departed . . . into a desert place apart."

In this outside place He becomes the attractive centre of the needy. "They followed Him on foot out of the cities." Driven by their need and drawn by His grace, they follow Him into the path of separation. So with ourselves; we have needs as sinners and needs as saints, and no one in all this world can meet one need or the other. As sinners we need a Saviour to relieve us of our sins and all that lies upon us as of a fallen race; as believers we need an object to satisfy our hearts. Thus we are drawn to Him outside this world, that has become to us a desert by reason of the spiritual needs that have been awakened in our souls, to find in Jesus One who can make the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose.

Coming to Him in the outside place we discover, like the needy multitudes of old, His deep perfections. We discern, as they did, that He is not One that has to be constrained to bless, but One who is willing and ready to bless, as we read "*Jesus went forth*" to meet them. The father ran to meet the returning prodigal, and "*Jesus went forth*" to meet these needy souls (14).

Moreover in His company we find ourselves in the presence of One who fully appreciates our needs, for we read, He "*saw a great multitude.*" We see but little of our need, or the need of others, but His gaze takes in "*a great multitude.*" He sees our need in all its vast extent.

Further, not only has He divine knowledge of our need, but divine compassion for us in our misery. He "*was moved with compassion toward them.*" His heart of love feels for us as no other heart can ever feel.

Moreover with Christ there is power to meet the need, for we read, "*He healed their sick.*" With Christ it is not compassion without power, nor power without compassion, as with others. His heart and His hand are at our disposal; and the hand that heals is moved by a heart that loves.

How blessed to have found in Christ, in the outside place, One who is willing to bless, who has divine knowledge of our need, who has a heart that can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and a hand that is able to meet our needs. And we discover these resources in Christ in the place of our need. In the day of glory we shall still *enjoy* His infinite perfections but in the dark and cloudy day we *learn* His perfections. We learn them where we need them, like the multitude of old; for the time was evening, the place a desert, and the people hungry.

However Christ is with them, and the disciples take the right course; they "Come to Him." They turn to the One with the perfect knowledge, infinite love, and divine power. Who can turn to Him in vain, though, at times, He may have lessons to teach us before He intervenes on our behalf? He would have us to realize our need, and, what is more difficult to learn, our own utter weakness and utter incapacity to meet our need. It was thus with the disciples. To

bring home to them their own weakness, the Lord can say "Give ye them to eat." At once they have to confess they have but five loaves and two small fishes. They realize not only that they are a needy people in a darkening scene and a desert place, but that their own resources are utterly insufficient to meet their need. They are shut up to Christ. And this is still where Christ would bring us in all our difficulties, for here He can meet us and act on our behalf.

So at once the Lord says, "Bring them hither to Me."—ME—the One who knows, who loves, and who has the power to meet the need. And still in all our difficulties, our trials, our sorrows, our exercises and our failures, He is saying "Bring them hither to Me. He invites us to come in all our weakness to Himself.

How blessed is the result! First all are brought to rest. Then He takes the very things which were the witness of their weakness, and brings earth's weakness into touch with heaven's fulness, with the result the people were not only fed but filled, and there "remained twelve baskets full." His grace can meet our need, but our need will never exhaust His grace.

IV.

THE STORMY SEA—Matt. xiv. 22-36.

NOW the scene changes and we are permitted to see the Lord in an entirely new position, setting forth fresh truths. In the former scene He was in "a desert place apart (13); here He is in "a moun-

tain apart" (23). There we learn in a picture that Christ is entirely outside the course of this world, here we learn that He has entered upon a new world. The mountain position speaks to us of the place He has taken on high. Moreover we learn that though He is on high His heart of love is still occupied with His people who are passing through this world, for we read, "He went up to pray." In the place of glory He intercedes for His people.

And what of His people for whom He intercedes? They are in a scene of ever increasing darkness, for we read, "the evening was come" (23); they are surrounded by a world that is opposed, for they are "in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves," and the power of Satan is against them—"the wind was contrary" (24).

They are not left, however, to struggle alone with their difficulties as if sufficient for these things. The Lord comes to His people, as we read, "in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them." In the desert it was the needy people who came to Him, for as we have seen "they followed Him." To-day His direct dealings with this world are over, and He is concerned with His people alone. Here He not only comes to His people, but He comes in a way that was new and strange to the disciples. He came "walking on the sea." They had known Him as the One who had been with them in the boat and slept upon the sea. And beautiful indeed it was to see Him, as the dependent Man amongst men, in such perfect con-

confidence in the Father's love that He can sleep in the storm on the sea; but this occasioned no fear. Now, however, they see a Man walking on the sea in the storm, and they are troubled and cried out with fear.

They had known Him as the One who was with them in the storm, now they see Him as beyond all weariness and above all storms. Such is His position to-day. Not only is He apart from the world, He is above the world, and beyond the reach of its storms. The storm of Calvary has spent itself. Death hath no more dominion over Him. He walks upon the waves.

If, however, they have to learn Christ in a new way, they will also find that it is the same Jesus. The Jesus who as the lowly One had slept on the sea, is the same Jesus who, as the mighty One, can walk upon the sea. Thus He can say to His disciples, "It is I; be not afraid."

Thus the Lord comes to His own—His Jewish disciples—who had journeyed with Him in His pathway here. Moreover, if He comes, it is to attract them to Himself outside of the Jewish system. They were in the ship, and a ship is a human device to keep people afloat on an element otherwise impossible to them. Such was the Jewish system with which the disciples of the Lord were connected; and such is every human system that man devises after the pattern of the Jewish system—devices to maintain people religiously without intimate contact with Christ.

The Lord thus presents Himself as the One who is interceding for His people—occupied wholly with them; who is above all storms—superior to every power, and as the One who is outside every device to sustain man in this world. Moreover if He presents Himself to His people it is to attract them to Himself in the outside place. If, however we are to be drawn outside the systems of men it can only be as having Christ Himself before our souls as our one Object, and as having Christ's word as our sole authority. This is very blessedly set forth in Peter. He seems to say, "If I am to leave the ship, if I am to walk on the water, it must be Thyself as my Object, and Thy word as my authority"—"Lord it is Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water." He has found an Object that attracts his heart, and he receives a word that gives him authority, for the Lord says "Come."

This beautiful picture thus sets forth the truth of the Church, unfolded to believers after the Lord had taken His place on high, by which Christ's Assembly is separated from a worldly religious system to gather to Christ as the new centre. This truth is summed up for us in the Epistle to the Hebrews where we are exhorted "to go forth unto Him without the Camp."

How slow we are to realize that Christianity presents a company of believers gathered together with Christ as their centre, their bond, their all. The natural man can understand a company of people bound

together by articles of religion, and organized by some central and visible authority, but nature cannot conceive of a company of people held together in unity without any humanly devised articles of religion, without any visible human authority,—held together, guided, and sustained in the face of all opposition by an unseen Head. To the natural man this is as impossible as walking on the water.

The moment Peter stepped upon the water he was in a position in which he no longer had the aid of the ship to sustain him, and in which nature was of no avail. Not all the concentrated energies of man, nor all the wisdom of the ages would enable a man to walk upon the water. The one who takes such a position is wholly and altogether dependent upon Christ. We can float upon the water in a boat, but we cannot walk upon the water without Christ.

Further we see the motive that led Peter to leave the ship and walk upon the sea. It was, as we read, "*to go to Jesus.*" His object was not simply to get away from the ship, still less to walk on the water, but definitely and only "to go to Jesus." He did not leave the ship because it was "tossed with waves," or because of any troubles in the ship. The Lord was outside the ship, and love would fain be in His company, and faith realized, that if the Lord gave the word to come to Him, the Lord would be able to sustain the one who answered to His word.

How blessedly the principles that mark the path of separation are summed up for us in verse 29. In *obedience* to Christ's word, "Come," Peter came down out of the ship. In *faith* "he walked on the water." In *affection* "he walked on the water to go to Jesus." If in our day we take a place of separation outside the religious systems formed by sincere men after the pattern of Judaism, we shall find that it is a path that demands unswerving obedience to the Word; that calls for faith in Christ, and affection for Christ.

Moreover there are other lessons for Peter, and for ourselves through Peter, in what follows. Lessons that can only be learnt in the outside place. Peter has faith to leave the ship "to go to Jesus," but is Peter's faith sufficient to face a storm? And if Peter fails and begins to sink is the Lord, who was able to sustain Peter when walking on the sea, willing to save Peter when sinking in the sea?

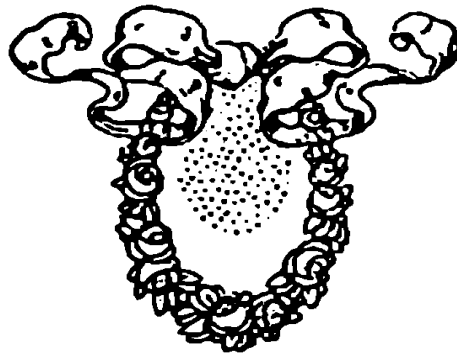
Peter has to learn, and we with him, that in the outside place everything depends upon the Lord, and directly the eye is off the Lord we begin to sink in the presence of the storm. Thus it comes to pass Peter is put to the test in order to learn his own weakness and the Lord's sufficiency. To learn these wholesome lessons, Peter has to face the storm. The wind grows "boisterous," the waves run high, and when Peter "saw the wind boisterous" he began to sink. Looking upon Jesus he walked upon the water; looking upon

the storm he sinks in the water. Peter has to learn that if Jesus is the One who walks on the water and says "Come," He is the only One who can sustain us when we do come. It was as impossible for Peter to walk on the water in a calm as in a storm. It was as easy for the Lord to sustain Peter in the storm as in the calm.

Thus we learn our weakness; but in doing so we learn Christ's sufficiency. In sinking Peter cried to the Lord to save him, and immediately the hand of the Lord is stretched out to save. If the love of the Lord attracts to Himself in the outside place, the hand of the Lord can sustain in spite of every storm. Nevertheless if His gracious hand is ready to save us from sinking, He may have to rebuke our unbelief.

Those in the ship might have thought it enthusiastic madness on the part of Peter to leave the ship and attempt to do what no man had ever done before. They might condemn him for doing something contrary to nature and reason, and congratulate themselves for not sinking like Peter or being rebuked like Peter. Yet be it remembered that if they did not sink in the water like Peter, neither did they walk on the water like Peter; and if they did not suffer the rebuke of the Lord's words, neither did they get the support of the Lord's hand.

The closing verses of the chapter, in which the Lord returns to the ship with Peter, present a picture of the day that is yet to come when the Lord will return to earth with His saints, and renew His links with Israel. Then indeed the storms of earth will be over and peace at last will come to the world. Jesus, who was once rejected, will be owned as the Son of God and millennial blessing will be introduced.



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