

CHRIST AS THE GLORY OF GOD'S UNIVERSE.

(LUKE IV. 5-8; REV. XIII. 1-2, 16-18; XIV. 1;
I COR. XV. 23-28.)

WE are all impressed by the fact that the time in which we live is not an ordinary time; it is one of profound significance, and we need to be wise concerning it, for we are passing through the rounding-up of things, and the position in which those who have a measure of light are found is one of serious responsibility. I read these scriptures with the idea that we might take our bearings a little as to where we are in the midst of these things.

I take it that there was a very distinct new point of departure when the Lord Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, fresh from His baptism with the wondrous testimony from the Father concerning Him, was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. It is evident enough that when the Lord Jesus came forth in His ministry there was, so far as God was concerned, no further place for any other man or the spirit of any other man. It was not necessary in a moral way to wait for the cross, for the Lord once manifested in this way expressed for God finality, and He stood there solitary in all the moral grandeur

of that position. For the eye that could see it as the divine eye saw it, there was in that Person the complete expression of all the moral system—the moral universe—in its perfection and glory; every element of it rested in that blessed Man. Not only was it true that God found in Him what had never been found in man before—a perfectly attuned response to every divine desire, a perfect expression of divine pleasure—but there was more than that: there were embraced in His being the elements which eventually will fill the whole universe. He stood there thus: He is there for us to contemplate in that light, for the Holy Spirit has brought us the light of it. Now in connection with Satanic power, the coming of the devil in the way of temptation was what we might call crucial—it was a critical moment. The conflict has ever been the same since the habitable earth was occupied by man; the object of it is, that man should be forged under Satanic influence into an instrument of opposition to the will and pleasure of God. That is the conflict—that where the divine mind has expressed its intention of finding its pleasure (that is, in man), there the Satanic will would form a tool to oppose the will of God; so we find the attack has been consistent all the way through. The attempt was made upon David, for the thoughts of God were centred in him, and Satan approached him, and

David personally was caught in the wile. Then when power was vested in the Gentil (which power we now come under by inheritance), and a vision was given as to the unfolding of things upon earth, beginning with the image with the head of gold, the Satanic suggestion to Nebuchadnezzar came very promptly, that he himself should appropriate the idea, and become the object of worship, according to what Daniel said to him, "Thou art this head of gold." Then the image of gold appears on the plains of Dura, and all the habitable earth is called to give its worship and homage to that image, really to Nebuchadnezzar. So the consistent line on which the conflict ever advances, is to work upon human material to turn it into a weapon of opposition to the pleasure of God.

Now there appears a Man of a different spirit and of a different order. For thirty years He had lived here, and up to that point there had been nothing vulnerable in Him, nothing touchable, nothing upon which the least scar or mark could be made. He came from the baptism as He went to it, and so He entered the wilderness—the perfect, sweet expression of the will of God. Now the Satanic mind has Him for its object, for with Christ won, the victory is won, but so long as Christ stands "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," the ground is maintained against Satan. We see that the devil's mind is for

world-domination. We associate the thought of world-domination with empires, with kingdoms, and with men and the like, but behind it all is a genius superior to any Cæsar or Napoleon, for the idea of world-domination is an idea of Satan; so when the blessed Lord comes here, and in His coming brings in the elements of the kingdom of God, then comes Satan, and presents to Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them in a moment of time. What a majestic conception! What a vision to spread out before a Man who had come from the village of Nazareth and the carpenter's bench into the wilderness, to hold out to Him all the kingdoms of the world, and to say, "All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me . . . if thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine." That was a great vision! It has ever turned the hearts of men. It is a great mistake to think that such clumsy, brutal things as war, slaughter, and bloodshed are the most deadly instruments of Satan; not at all, his most deadly instruments are those which he uses to work upon the lusts, the senses, and the desires of men, or upon their pride and ambition, or upon their religious emotions—these are the weapons which Satan uses to control the minds and moral beings of men against God, and they are presented to Jesus, but the prince of this world coming found nothing in Him.

Satan would centralise the power in the hands of one man, upon the condition that the power was received from him, and the homage rendered to him for it, because then there would be an organisation of man designed to thwart the will and pleasure of God. But the mighty victory which was won there in Jesus, established for ever that an order of man had come into the scene which was impregnable, which carried with it a spirit that was unassailable; and so into the hands of the blessed Lord there was given the power of a kingdom, which neither Satan nor death itself could overthrow, and the moral glory of a sway through which God would illumine the whole of His universe. He will do that through the spirit of the Man Christ Jesus; for the spirit that shone out in Him was untouchable by every presentation of the glory of man. That spirit is to be clothed upon everything which hath breath, that it may live before God. It is a great vision, but the Spirit of God brings it before our souls in this way, and one loves to dwell upon its imperishable glory in the person of that solitary Man in His path here of absolute dependence upon God, as expressed in the language of the Psalmist, "Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust." It is a wondrous vision which the Spirit of God gives us, that the spirit of that Man is eventually,

and before long, to be the only thing in evidence in the whole universe of God.

I read the scripture in Revelation xiii., for we are, so to speak, upon the sands of the sea. We read that the prophet—our brother John—stood upon the sands of the sea, and he saw emerging from the waters of the sea a beast, which has no similitude in anything, that the eye of man has ever seen ; in other words, a monstrosity, and a monstrosity which in its characteristics is appalling. It combined the features of a leopard, a bear, and a lion. We are, as I have said, on the sands of the sea, and what our eyes witness in the present time in which we live is the beginning of the surging of the waves of the sea ; in other words, the fountains of the deep are being broken up, and we witness a disturbance in the nations of the earth which will never again be settled until the Lord Jesus Himself determines the issue by His own coming, that is, by His taking up the throne of authority in connection with the earth. I do not mean that your eyes and mine will see the emerging of this beast from the waves of the sea from our present position here under the sun ; our point of view will doubtless be, that we shall see that terrible event by looking down upon it. One has every confidence the Lord does not intend to leave that which belongs to Him here in this scene to face that awful moment, but it would be utter folly if we did not take ac-

count of the fact, that already the disturbance of the waters has set in in such a way, that they will never again be pacified; that is to say, the families of men, the conditions of living which we have known in the past, one need never expect to see restored again. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." The significance of this is that such a state of things is universal, one sees it all over the world; it is not a question of being in distress financially, but there is a poison of discontent, of agitation, a readiness for violence, which will never again, I believe, be checked or subdued so far as this earth is concerned until the Lord stills it. We need to be wise as to this, or we shall not be separated from the present course of things in the spirit of our minds. The Spirit of God has given us this vision in order that we may see it, and know its characteristics before the world comes into it. The beast which arises is, as I understand it, the last desperate attempt of Satan to secure world-domination before the end of the world be come. He has failed with Christ, he is to be cast down out of heaven, as we see in chapter xii., and there is but one desperate chance left, and that is, that out of the masses of the violence of this world, he may get his man with his characteristics of energy, cruelty, and lust of power, who shall yield him the homage that belongs to God only.

We have to be careful that we do not come under the spell of that kind of thing. We are enveloped in an atmosphere that is most dangerous, unless we are alive to the elements that are rife in it. The bonds, so to speak, which for six thousand years have compacted men so that they could in some fashion live together are being melted apart before our eyes. The family ties, sacred through long ages, are being despised, the standard of morality is being lowered, immorality in a thousand forms is spreading, and the relations which hold men, employers and employed, are all dissolving. The ideas of government are being exchanged for those of lawlessness in which every man is to be the arbiter of his own doings, and the effect of all this will be a condition of things, in which it is impossible for men to live together. It is a problem, the solution of which is becoming the despair of statesmen, for, while they are crying, "Peace, peace," they can see very well through it all, that the elements they are handling are elements of jealousy, hatred, and discord, where mass is against class, possessor against those who possess not, and a condition of things under which man cannot exist. That spirit is abroad now, though the fruition of it in its terrible fulness is to be after we are gone.

But what I want to call attention to is the fact, that the subtle and poisonous influences

of these things are apt to come upon us. A great many of you here are parents ; a great many of you have had to make sacrifices, which one is convinced the Lord greatly appreciates ; you have been called upon to give your sons, and you have joined with their faith and devotion in seeing them accept the path of reproach ; so with the wives who have given up their husbands, and have strengthened them in connection with the position they have taken, in response and in obedience to the word of God, to be subject to "the powers that be." A great many of you are young men, who have been through the conflict, a conflict many of us never thought we should see this side of heaven, but you have been through it. One does not know what may yet be the mind of the Lord for us ; we may be left here for a little season longer. We say, things cannot continue much longer, but the Lord may still have an intention and purpose, for which we must be left here a little longer ; and as one who may not see your faces again in this world, and who has been taking observations for many weeks amongst you, I desire just to speak a very simple, common-place word as to the elements of danger, which approach you in your workshops, in your homes, in that which you read, and that which your minds feed upon, for, depend on this, the conflict is not over. You have had five years of struggle and agony—the world has agonised

and you have agonised in it—but the conflict is not over ; it is on in a more subtle form, and one in which you need to be strengthened with the manner of spirit, that is in the Man Christ Jesus. So the Spirit of God has given us the vision of the beast, and He shews us, that eventually our brethren who follow us will be brought face to face with a crucial test, that they may neither buy nor sell, unless they carry the marks of subservience to a power, which Satan has raised up against God. It is very striking the way in which it is put, that the mark of the beast is attached to the forehead or to the right hand. What does that cover ? It covers everything ; it covers the man of brains, the man who invents and directs things, who organises, controls, and administers—all such are to be brought under the domination of Satan's man ; it includes, too, the maker, the doer, the mechanic, and that " right hand " is to be organised as the brain is organised, so that neither the owner of the brain nor the owner of the hand may move or exist unless he yields his subjection to the man whom Satan raises up in opposition to God. That spirit is at work now ; how far we may yet have to go to be tested by it remains to be seen, but that the conflict is on in a more subtle form, and that you will meet it in your shops, in your offices, in your factories, in your homes, and in the literature and things which flood

your eyes, and in the demand which is made upon your young people, is, I think, incontestable, and I suggest that the Spirit of God gives us warning concerning all these things in advance.

I turn now for a moment to the verses we read in I Corinthians xv. The word that peculiarly attracted me in connection with that scripture was, "Then cometh the end." I would like to emphasise that, for it is a divine expression, bringing before us the ultimate outcome, and winding up of all the ways of God. It is a very striking expression, and if we are to take part intelligently in the conflict we must have an intelligent appreciation of what is "the end." Now what is "the end"? So far as I understand it, I shall seek to outline the course of things which will eventuate in "the end" here spoken of. The kingdom of God established in the Person of Christ brought in elements of righteousness, peace, and joy, which furnish, wherever they are found, impregnable material against the power of evil. It operates now through the Holy Spirit, and the spirit of the Man Christ Jesus being once discovered upon earth, that spirit is perpetuated, and never suffered to disappear. The pleasure of God is wrapped up in it, and it remains here until the Lord removes His own out of this scene. Meanwhile, about this the Lord puts a mantle of protection, He puts over it the

kingdom of power, which is administered from the throne of grace, so that no power of evil has been allowed to check or stay the divine power, which has been exercised here on earth steadily, and with distinct and definite purpose to secure everything which belongs to Christ out of this present evil world. Nothing is missed, nothing fails. Two thousand years have elapsed, yet with all the surging of the power of evil, there has been maintained a divine power in the kingdom, which has continued to draw out of this present evil world every atom of that which belongs to Christ. In the light of this one gets a great sense of power, and so we see that eventually the purpose of God will be fully accomplished—His supreme purpose in sonship, which was in His mind and heart from before the foundation of the world. All about us and around us the Satanic power is held back, and conflict in the heavenlies is maintained by unseen and divine power, whilst everything that the Father has given to Christ is being brought to light by the Holy Spirit, and attached imperishably to the divine system. Then we come to a point of time, which I believe we shall reach very soon—the rapture, as we speak of it. This will mark a definite issue, when for the moment from the whole scene will be removed both that which has gone to its sleep from Abel onward, and that which is “alive and remains.” Everything, which has

had the sweet and holy touch of life to connect it with the divine order which centres in Christ, will be lifted out of this scene. Then divine operations will go on to resume their blessed power in other ways, and the heart of the Lord will be seen reaching out to His earthly people, whom He has never forgotten; "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness." The Lord will begin on that line, and the kingdom will still be maintained in all its vital elements, until in connection with the work of the remnant there will be gathered out all that belongs to Christ.

It is in the midst of that work that this Satanic beast arises out of the sea, and that our brethren after us come into their tests, and fierce conflict; and I commend the thought to you, that the light and value of the experiences which our dear young brethren have passed through, and in which they have through grace stood faithfully for the Lord, will be an enormous support and education for our brethren—the suffering remnant—who follow us in the days yet to come. The kingdom, which was established at the outset in Jesus in the conflict in the wilderness, carries all through that period. How blessed to remember this! Then the Lord comes to take up things on earth, to end kingdoms, dominions, principalities, and powers

which have been administered for six thousand years with every element of violence and corruption and the pride and arrogance of man. He will sweep all these aside, and bring in the sweet pure light of the "world to come," when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea"; where every mind of man will take pleasure in the will of God, where every heart will be in full accord with the expression of the mind of God, and where everything here will answer in true response to the pleasure of God.

In the "world to come" (call it the millennium, if you will), the day of God's pleasure, this poor, tortured, weary world, in which men have been born, have lived, and done their wicked wills, is swept clean, to bring in a generation of those who love, and take pleasure in the will of God. Jesus does that. "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity." He gives God, in connection with this earth, one day—a thousand years—of unalloyed pleasure. It is an everlasting kingdom, as Peter speaks of it. for as the kingdom is introduced in all the freshness, energy, and glory of a life that is supplied from heaven itself, so does it run its course for a thousand years without decay or moral breakdown. There never has been an

empire on earth that has lasted a thousand years ; there never has been an empire, but so soon as it began to exist began to decay through corruption and violence ; but here the vision is given our souls of the everlasting kingdom. It is an everlasting kingdom not in the sense that it lasts for ever, but that its moral elements are eternal in character. As at the outset, it is outspread in all its perfectness for the creature to dwell in the pleasure of God, so at the end it still remains in all its original vigour, vitality, and blessing.

That which was committed into the hands of Jesus as the dependent Man at the outset has been effectuated. "Then cometh the end" ; and we see the blessed Lord, having put all His enemies under His feet, and the last enemy—death (the great white throne having accomplished its purpose), being destroyed also, He Himself becoming subject unto Him, that put all things under Him. Wonderful contrast as He is to Adam in his traitorous surrender to Satan, we see Him going in as Man to God the Father, and tendering back to Him the authority which had been committed to Him. It was so committed, that He might fulfil in the history of time the good pleasure of God, bringing out from the midst of the chaos and ruin, that which was pleasurable to the Father, and gathering up every family into its appointed sphere of blessing. He goes in to God, even the Father, and "then

cometh the end." One might so paraphrase "It is finished"—those sweet and sacred words of the Lord on the cross, when He yielded His spirit to the Father, and laid the moral foundation on which the universe of blessing could be built. What we see here is time ended; there is no further occasion for time—eternity is to exist and eternity alone. The Son presents everything accomplished in all its glorious perfection to God, even the Father; then He Himself, as Son, as the Man who suffered and bled for us, as the Man who is glorified now at the right hand of God, as that Man He Himself becomes subject, that "God may be all in all."

Well, beloved brethren, I believe that we are in the crucial moment, we are so to speak in the flux of things. All the elements that have bound men are loosening and melting apart, as I have said. As the challenge comes concerning the number of the beast, wisdom calls upon us to discern the characteristics that belong to the Man Christ Jesus, and to love them, and to seek by the power of the Holy Spirit, to be dominated by their influence, for God will not tolerate a universe that has one atom in it that is not like Christ. His thought is to bring us into conformity to that blessed Man. May God help us to that end. F. L.

