

A HIGH PRIEST OF GOOD THINGS TO COME.

HEBREWS ix.

THE worship of Israel, under the law, was on a principle of far greater distance from God than that of the fathers, when they sojourned in the Land of Promise, as in a strange land. Wherever Abraham went in the land, he found room to pitch his tent, and build his altar ; and there he called on the name of the Lord. The intercourse between Abraham and the Lord was much more free, and much more confidential, than any Israelite under the law could possibly attain to. Abraham knew the Lord only in grace. It was grace which had called him from his idolatry ; and it was grace which had made him so many precious promises. And on this ground Abraham could stand before the Lord, and plead with him for Sodom, although he was himself but dust and ashes.

But to man's eye, the service of God connected with the tabernacle, would be by far the most attractive. It would be thought an advance in the order of worship on the rude altar of the fathers. But the order of the tabernacle was, in fact, restriction on the liberty of worship. And yet it is to this that the human mind so constantly and naturally turns. This is the pattern which man proposes for himself ; the necessary consequence of which is, that his worship is—in the spirit of bondage. A devoted Israelite, though he stood purified as to the flesh, might have looked back with regret on the far happier and nearer worship of the fathers. After all that the high priest had done for him, he could only approach the outside of the tabernacle, he dare not enter within. The law, in all its institutions, preserved that element which was so conspicuous at its promulgation—bounds were set around the mountain, lest the people should

break through to gaze. Near and intimate approach to God was unceasingly denied by some divinely appointed bound.

It is, indeed, true, that an Israelite enjoyed nearness to God, when compared with the inhabitants of the nations around him; for the world having fallen into idolatry after the flood, God had given it up to its own lusts; and having called out one nation, and constituted that a nation of worshippers of the true God, He thus distinguished them from all other nations on the earth. Thus Israel nationally stood before the Lord, and worshipped Him, whilst all other nations bowed before their idols.

But although, compared with others, Israel stood so nigh, they were nevertheless denied, by the most solemn statutes, free access to the presence of their God. They must approach with measured steps, never passing the appointed limit. There was the outer circle of a worshipping people, and the inner circle of worshipping priests; while nearest of all, and the only one who dare draw *nigh*, the high priest ministered alone in the holiest. Thus while Israel, as a nation, was taken from all other nations as God's peculiar heritage and witness, yet it was within that nation that God fixed the clearest testimony, that no way was yet opened into the holiest of all. Distance and restriction were most forcibly taught amidst the only nation brought nigh.

But Israel has become corrupt; and as God gave up the Gentiles to their lusts, so has He scattered for a time His chosen nation, and set aside its polity. Now corruption in worship has almost always consisted in re-establishing what God has disowned. Just, therefore, as natural religion is the assertion of man's ability to take that place before God as a *creature*, which as a *sinner* he has lost, so national religion is the return to Judaism which God has disowned. People-worship without, and priest-worship within, is not now the order of God; nor has God now any other worshipping nation, than that which is formed by the whole body of believers, called out of every nation, and people, and tongue, to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

But let us come to the tabernacle itself, to learn what is God's present order of worship, and what are the good things to come, which are now freely given to us. We have

already noticed, that there were in Israel the worshipping people outside the tabernacle, and the worshipping priests within. It is with the latter we have now to do ; for our present good things constitute blessed contrasts, even to the then privileges of the priests themselves. Let us dismiss, therefore, from our minds, the people worshipping without, whilst priestly ministry was accomplished within, and let us fix our attention, as the Holy Ghost in this chapter leads us to do, on the tabernacle itself, and the priestly family serving in its holy places.

The tabernacle was of most exquisite beauty. This could be discerned in some degree even by the eye of an outside worshipper. But the holy place, in which the priests habitually ministered, was furnished with the exquisitely wrought golden candlestick, the table of shew-bread overlaid with gold, and the golden altar of incense. These things their eyes constantly looked upon, and they must have felt that they were amidst things peculiarly belonging to God, though denied entrance into that holy chamber in which God's glory visibly dwelt. They must have always felt near God, though never immediately in His presence. From the holiest of all, the beautiful veil still separated them. Into that most holy place, within which were the golden censer, the ark of the covenant, and the cherubims overshadowing the mercy-seat, they never entered. They had no access to the mercy-seat. There was one indeed—the high priest—who had access even there—who could pass within the veil, and minister before the mercy-seat itself in the actual presence of God. But this was only once a year. At all other times Aaron could only minister among his priestly family in the holy place. Bounds were thus set, not only around, but also within the tabernacle ; and set, not only on the priests, but even on the high priest himself.

Now let us well mark the comment of the apostle on this order of worship. “ The priests went always into the *first* tabernacle accomplishing the service of God ; but into the *second* went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and the errors of the people. *The Ho'y Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holies was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing.*”

What could more forcibly testify, that the way into the holies was not yet made manifest, than facts such as that none but *priests* could enter the *holy place*; and that those very priests, so constantly serving there, could never pass on into the *holiest*; and again, that the high priest himself must not enter “*at all times*” into the holiest, but only “*once a year*?” Enough, indeed, was *permitted* to constitute the tabernacle, and its order, a “*shadow of good things to come* ;” but that tabernacle ever testified to those who worshipped in it, that it was but a figure for the time then present, and that it knew of no service by which, as to the conscience, they could be made perfect. Its holies were not thrown open even to those who had services appointed them therein—no liberty to go in and out was there allowed—no way to the mercy-seat, free to all, or open at all times, could be found there.

The annual solemnity of the great day of atonement must indeed have been bright in prospect, not only to the people and the priests, but to the high priest himself; but after it was over, it must have been a day much regretted, especially by him who had for that day such peculiar access unto God, but who was afterwards cast into comparative distance from God to exercise his ministry outside the veil. Aaron’s highest privilege was of very seldom occurrence, only *once a year*.

But the Holy Ghost declares that *now* the way into the holies is open, through Jesus, the High Priest of good things to come. The redemption found by Aaron in the blood of bulls and goats did not avail to give access to the mercy-seat, nor to purge the worshippers’ conscience; but Christ has found “*eternal redemption* ;” and having thereon entered into the true holies, He has become the High Priest of those most precious “*good things*,” *liberty* and *peace* in the *presence of God*. As long as the first tabernacle was standing, these things could not be known—no redemption had been found on which they could be based—no high priest anointed by whom they could be ministered. The whole order of that first tabernacle spoke of restriction, not liberty; and so far from providing purgedness of conscience, its very offerings for sin brought the remembrance of sins upon the offerer.

And what then must be the consequence of taking the pattern of that tabernacle as the model for the worship of Christians? Must not the Holiest, that is, the very presence of God, be barred against their approach? This must be so, even if they are allowed to be God's holy priesthood. But as this is not allowed, but only a certain class are admitted to be priests, the holy brethren must be denied all place whatsoever within the holies, and kept, like the congregation of Israel, without. Take the tabernacle and its order as the *pattern* instead of the *contrast* of Christian worship, and these consequences must result; and have they not abundantly resulted? Do we not see the laity without, the priestly clergy within? And are not souls fettered, and consciences unpurged, just as though the High Priest of good things to come had never entered on His blessed ministry at all?

But that High Priest has come! He is now the minister of the holy things; and, therefore, the blessed testimony of the Holy Ghost is, that "the good things to come" are present good things to faith. And what "a good thing to come" made present to us, that our abiding-place is now the Holies, with the veil rent and thrown open, so that the mercy-seat is ever open to us, and the countenance of God ever lifted up upon us! What a present consequence to us of eternal redemption having been obtained, and of our great High Priest having passed into the heavens!

The priests in the tabernacle might have looked back to the freer communion with God enjoyed by the fathers, or they might have looked forward to a still more blessed thing, even the day when Israel shall nationally be a kingdom of priests, according to the promise, "Ye shall be named the priests of the Lord; men shall call you the ministers of our God;" but between these good things past away and good things not yet come, they stood fettered and unpurged. But what they then looked forward to as a good thing yet to come, is substantiated to us *at present*, because Christ has already entered on His ministry as the *High Priest of good things to come*. All Israel's blessings are suspended on Israel's new order of priesthood—of which priesthood the High Priest alone is *actually* in His heavenly place of ministry, His fellow-priests (that is, all who believe in His name),

ministering there now only because He appears in the presence of God for them. But these priests do now, by faith, enjoy present liberty and perfect peace in that most Holy presence, though still, as to fact, sojourning and serving on earth. Israel nationally may be still beneath judicial darkness; the nominal Church may be blindly, though industriously, groping amidst its own patterns of God's shadows; but the High Priest of the good things themselves having come, faith receives from His hand its rich and living portion, and renders back its praises unto God.

But let us look at other contrasts drawn in this chapter by the Holy Ghost.

As to the way in which the Holiest of all was entered on the day appointed for that solemn service; how many preliminaries had to be attended to by Aaron. First, he must himself be provided with a sin-offering and a burnt-offering, as well as take of the children of Israel two kids of goats for a sin-offering, and one ram for a burnt-offering. Then he had to bring the bullock which was for himself, and to make an atonement for himself and for his house. This being done, he took a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord, and put the incense on it, that the cloud of the incense might cover the mercy-seat; and under the shelter, and amidst the fragrance of this, he sprinkled the blood of his sin-offering both upon and before the mercy-seat. But his work did not end here. He had to go out again, and to go through the same service for the people, offering their offerings as he had his own. And when the services of that day were completed, he must go out from the Holiest, and again be occupied with his ceaseless round of ineffectual offerings—the Holiest of all being closed against him until another year had run its course.

Now, mark the contrast to all this. "But Christ, being come a High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, *He entered in ONCE* into the holies, having obtained *eternal* redemption."

The Holy Ghost evidently delights to glorify the Lord Jesus. Others might have been anointed, but He is THE Christ—The Anointed One. That appellation belongs to

the Son, as it belongs to no other. It is "Christ," then, who is now present* in his own place of ministry, as, "The High Priest of good things to come." To enter into His place of ministry, He has passed through a far greater and more perfect tabernacle than that through which Aaron passed into his peculiar place of service. Christ has passed through the heavens. Man's hands were not employed to make these; they are the handy-work of God himself. Christ is gone into *heaven itself*: there, in the immediate presence of God, He appears for us. On earth He was not a priest; no tabernacle ever existed on earth suited to so great an High Priest as Jesus the Son of God, Man's hands may not rear a place of ministry for this High Priest. His person and His sacrifice demand a sphere of ministry suited to their value, and hence His tabernacle is "*not of this creation.*" The attempt to honour Him with costly things made with hands, is to forget the dignity of our High Priest, and the heavenly order of His priesthood.

Let us remember that He has passed through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not in His own individual right as Divine and as perfect, but as a priest in connection with others. Had he entered simply in His own right, he might have demanded entrance, saying, "Lift up your heads O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in." But He entered by His own blood, for He passed through as a priest. Aaron, on the great day of atonement, passed through the court and the holy place into the holiest with the basin of blood in his hands; that was the title on which he entered there—even the blood of that sin-offering. Aaron was taught that in that blood there was atonement for the sins of the people for the past year. Now Christ also entered through blood into the true tabernacle; but what says the Holy Ghost of Him whom He delights to honour? "Neither by the blood of bulls and goats, but *by His own blood.*" The blood of bulls was suited to the tabernacle "of this building," but such blood never could give title to worship in the tabernacle "not made with hands:" the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son

* The word "come" may, possibly, a little embarrass the sense. We have the expression, "came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness;" that is, he was *present* there preaching.

of God, is required for that; and He himself also, as high priest, to carry it in. How constantly do we find that our highest blessings rest on the simplest truths. Our happy liberty of worship as saints, and our nearness unto God for ever, hinge on the value before God of the blood of His Son. If we keep at a distance from God; if our consciences are unpurged in His presence; it is because we underrate the value of that blood, or forget what its once-offering has accomplished.

It is not to be wondered at that men should be ready to turn back to sanctification by ordinances; the flesh would, as it were, naturally cling to any order of things which seemed in any wise to sanction and to sanctify it. A system for the purification of the flesh would be tenaciously retained by the flesh. But God has no such system now. He has tried man under it, and his utter ruin having been there proved, He has for ever set the flesh aside. Its claims and efforts spring therefore from its ignorance of itself, and of God's ways concerning it. God now has provided not for the *flesh* but for the *conscience*. He has no ordinance now by which the flesh may draw, in any degree, nigh; all these ordinances are gone for ever; but He has given His own Son to bring in eternal redemption, and to give present peace and confidence in His presence. Hence God's grand object now is to glorify Jesus. He presents Him to us as the one in whom we shall find every thing we need. And hence Christ must be all or nothing. He must be exalted, and man abased; for if man is set up, Christ has died in vain.

There is not only great power, but also great comprehensiveness in that word ONCE. It shows us that the offering of Jesus *once* comprised the fulfilment of all the typical sacrifices. Not only that his *one sacrifice* does this; but that the *once offering* of that one sacrifice did it. This is often forgotten, and hence many souls lack peace. They trust only the *one sacrifice*, and so have *salvation*; but they do not clearly see the effectual power *its once offering* had to "perfect for ever them that are sanctified," and so have not *peace*. It is very humbling and very sorrowful that it should be so, because this is the especial testimony of God concerning that once-offered sacrifice; but so it is, never-

theless. Gradual declension in the Church opened the door for this practical unbelief, and bad teaching perpetuates it. But let the saints of God remember that as surely as there is but *one* Lamb of God, so surely that Lamb can be but *once* offered; and that that one sacrifice having been once offered, "THERE REMAINETH NO MORE OFFERING FOR SIN."

Aaron, then, had to make many offerings; but Christ, by His once offering of Himself, has *put away sin*. He has consequently no more priestly work to do *as the offerer of sacrifice for sin*. To say that He has, is to say that He has the cross to go through again as the victim, and that He has again to enter into the holiest by his own blood. And this would instantly nullify God's testimony as to the preciousness of that blood, and the work it has already done; for, I again repeat, His testimony is not merely that that blood alone cleanses from sin, but that the *once* shedding of that blood has so entirely put away sin, that God now says to all who believe therein, "Your sins and iniquities I will remember *no more*."

That the one and once-offered sacrifice of Christ did, because of the preciousness of His blood, fulfil *all* the typical sacrifices, is indeed plainly seen in verse 14 of this chapter; for we here have that blood set as the fulfilment, not only of the type of the blood offered on the Day of Atonement, but also as the fulfilment of the type of the Red Heifer. The law had its numberless forms of purification; by many modes and by many different acts did it prescribe for the purification of the flesh, but all these combine to enhance the value of Christ's blood as *once shed and once carried in by Him to God*. By that one shedding, and one presentation, we have had accomplished for our consciences for ever, what any or all the shadows effected for the flesh for a time. "If," says the Holy Ghost, "the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, *how much more* shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?"

What a ransom, then, has Christ found! By that blood

which He once shed on the cross, He has put away sin—that blood He has once—and once for all—carried into the true Holiest. And must He repeat His work, as did Aaron, as though that blood had, after a little while, lost its efficacy? No. When He comes out again, it will not be to continue or repeat any work for sin, but unto salvation. He has found eternal redemption, and has entered into the presence of God *as a consequence of His having done so.* What a blessed alteration in the statute! What Aaron did every year for Israel, and yet never did effectually, Christ has done once for all for us. The saints of God, therefore, stand on the ground of accomplished purification. Just as truly as the ordinances of old did bring a people in the flesh into a certain kind of purification before God, so truly, yea, “*much more*” so, has that one sacrifice of Christ brought all who believe into the unspeakable and eternal blessing of having “no more conscience of sin.” They may realise this, or they may not; but this is what Christ has obtained for them by His one offering. And just, therefore, as it would have been sinful unbelief for an Israelite of old who had touched a dead bone, to doubt that that uncleanness was gone when the ordinance of the sprinkled ashes had been observed by him, so is it nothing else than sinful unbelief, for one of God’s Israel now to doubt, that all his sin and guilt has been for ever atoned for and put away by the once offered sacrifice of Christ. Full faith in that sacrifice banishes conscience of sin. God delights in having provided this for us. He would have us serve Him in freedom, not in bondage. He never took pleasure in any sacrifice for sin until one was offered which put sin away for ever, and gave to the consciences of His worshippers peace in His presence. In that holy presence, therefore, we stand realising the everlasting results of Christ’s great day of atonement. The question of sin has been met by Him on our behalf—met and settled for ever; and, having put it away, He is now unto us the blessed minister of unmingled and eternal blessing. Christ’s present position, and our present blessings, are thus alike the consequences of our sins having been purged. Can any thing be more blessed than this! That we should, through faith, have already entered on our everlasting nearness to

God, and are now privileged to know the peace proper to the heavenly sanctuary. The true tabernacle is free to us—as free now as it will be when we stand personally amidst its glories. We belong to that priestly family anointed for its holies; not limited to a holy place, nor serving before a veiled mercy-seat, nor having brief access into the Holiest, but made meet for heaven itself, and worshipping with pure consciences in the immediate presence of God!

And do we prize as we should this blessing of a purged conscience? Do we discern the peculiar grace marking its bestowment? It was entirely unknown to worshippers under the law; not only unknown to the congregation who worshipped without, but equally so to the priests who served within. That first tabernacle must ever have been a house of bondage to conscience. Conscience can never be purged by what fails to bring nigh unto God. As long as full reconciliation was not known—as long as sin was found more effectual to exclude from God, than sacrifice for sin was to bring nigh to God—so long conscience could have known no purification. And not only people but priests, yea, not only priests but even high priests, must have had *sin*, not *salvation*, brought to remembrance by their constantly recurring sacrifices. Expiation, full and entire expiation, there was not; for had there been, the demand for expiation would have ceased. This thought must have continually forced itself on all worshipping under the shadows; and in proportion as conscience was tender and exercised, so would it be sensible of its unpurgedness. Such might fully understand that the flesh was purified for admission into that tabernacle by the appointed blood of bulls and of goats, while at the same time their consciences might be carrying a load of guilt, for which, in such blood, they found no remedy. But now it is not merely the putting away the *filth of the flesh*, but the *answer of a good conscience towards God* by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A purged conscience is, therefore, the distinctive blessing of the saints in this dispensation. A saint who has it not has forgotten, or (it may be through carelessness), has lost what became his, when, by faith, he passed beneath the blood-sprinkled lintel. “No more conscience of sin” is one of the very first good things bestowed on us by our blessed High Priest; and God

has provided through Him for its maintenance; for if that be not maintained, God well knows that we cannot worship Him in spirit and in truth. It is the everlasting efficacy of Christ's own blood, once carried in by Himself unto God, which secures this. All we need in order to its constant enjoyment is simple faith in that presented blood.

But though all we need in order to a *purged conscience* is simple faith in what Christ's blood has effected, we are to exercise ourselves to maintain a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man; and the saint of God, who, walking in the Spirit, seeks to maintain this *good conscience*, will be the most sensible of his many defects and failures, and so will most realise the blessedness of the *purged conscience* provided for him by the blood of Jesus. Such a saint will be quick of sense to detect defilement; he will feel a soil that others are insensible to. Every thing around us is tainted with death. Nature itself is defiled. The very charities of life have power to defile and deaden the soul. And to all this the Holy Ghost, who dwelleth in us, seeks to make us sensitive. If, therefore, there was not this ever effective provision for purgedness of conscience, the saint walking most in the Spirit would be bowing his head like a bulrush, and in terror before God, because conscious of so many defilements; though to others all would appear so fair and so devoted. Blessed indeed, therefore, to such, is the High Priest of good things to come. Blessed lessons both concerning holiness and concerning sin does His work for them enable them to learn: for all that they are learning of the purity of God, and of the more subtle and refined deceitfulness of their own hearts, only serves to prove to them the necessity, and to confirm to them the value of that blood by which they are redeemed and sanctified unto God. These are lessons of which the careless or unexercised soul is ignorant.

Let it be remembered, therefore, that every type of *cleansing* finds its fulfilment in the death and resurrection of Christ. It is not the work of the Spirit to purify, but to testify to the blood of Christ as purifying. The Holy Ghost comes to the saints as the witness of their cleanness, not as the producer of it. That Christ has already and for ever effected that, is the burden of the Spirit's testimony to

conscience : in this the Holy Ghost delights to declare the honour of Jesus. Just, therefore, as we simply receive His testimony, will our consciences be really purged.

I would add that it is not to the great and blessed doctrines of election and the like, or to the unfailingness of God's purposes, that the Holy Ghost specifically points the conscience in order to its purging, but expressly to *God's estimate of the blood of Christ*. For other precious purposes He does discourse to the saints on those blessed doctrines; but for the especial purpose of giving and of maintaining a purged conscience, He invariably directs the soul to that blood, as provided by God's infinite love for that very end.

The present portion, therefore, of the saint is to be ever in the true tabernacle, and to be there with a purged conscience. He is never an outside worshipper, nor an uncleaned one. Man's best efforts at worship only keep him at a distance from the living God: ordinances, however precious in their place, have the like tendency, just as they are used to bring nigh. This accounts for the ceaseless and restless labour of those who trust to them; for they heap burdens on conscience in the vain effort to relieve it, and entangle themselves but the more in the trammels from which they struggle to be free. It is the blood of Christ alone which frees from every fetter, and gives, at the same moment, liberty and an everlasting home in the happy presence of God.

Here, then, we have two marvellous blessings connected with the priesthood of Christ: the first, access into the true Holies, and abiding there as our ordinary place of worship; the other, perpetual purification of conscience through the blood of Jesus, even on the mercy-seat itself. It is on these two established privileges of the household of faith that our worship depends.

But there are other of the good things to come, made present to us through the priesthood of Jesus, mentioned in this chapter. For example: We have a house of worship everlastingly purified. Atonement was made of old for the holy sanctuary, and for the tabernacle of the congregation, as well as for the priests; and we are here told that as it was *necessary* that those patterns of things in the heavens should

be purified with the then appointed sacrifice, so was it *necessary* that the heavenly things themselves should be purified with better sacrifices than those; "for Christ is not entered into the holies made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

Now it is his having gone to appear *for us* there, which has rendered this purification of the heavenlies *necessary*. God is not only jealous of His own personal holiness, and so provides for the personal cleanness of those whom He brings into his presence; but He is also jealous of the purity of heaven—His dwelling place; and hence heaven also is purified by blood, that the entrance of sinners into it may in no wise defile it. And it greatly assures the priestly worshippers to find that they themselves are purified by that same blood, which thus preserves the purity of God's own dwelling-place and throne. One purification avails for all—God's Throne, God's Temple, God's High Priest, and God's Priests! For can we really think of heaven itself being our proper place of worship, without fearing that we may carry defilement into it? Do we not feel that *we* should tarnish and soil those pure and heavenly courts? Well, God has met this fear too: the true Holies cannot be defiled, for they have been purified for ever by the blood of Jesus. Thus has God prepared us for His presence, and His presence for us. All is done. Every plea that unbelief can put forth, for shrinking into the darkness which it loves, is disposed of for ever by this all-effectual blood!

"Having therefore, brethren, liberty to enter into the Holies by the blood of Jesus; by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water!"

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