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# THE FATHER.



By the late C. E. Stuart.



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## THE FATHER. .

(Matthew xi. 25-27.)

I WANT, my friends, to speak to you a few words on the *Father*. Let us look a little into the grounds we have to say that we believe in God the Father.

The supreme Being, whose power has been displayed in creation, and still more in redemption, that *He* is my Father—is it possible? The supreme Being whom we have never seen, is it possible that He stands in that relation to any of us, and that we have the privilege of calling Him *Father*?

We read: "No man knoweth the Son but the Father;" but it does not stop there: "Neither any man the Father save the Son." You observe the distinction between the Father and the Son. But then we read there *is* a revelation of the Father by the Son: "And he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." We are shut up to this: are we willing to have the Father revealed to us by the Son? It is a divine Person—the Son—who reveals to us another divine Person—the Father.

There is a different way to this in which God is spoken of as Father in the Old Testament. In Exodus iv., the first place where God is spoken of as Father, we see this brought out. The Lord tells Moses there: "Israel is my son, even my first-born." This is the first place in Scripture where we have such a truth in anyway mentioned, and here we see that the whole people of Israel could say of Jehovah, We are His son; but no single Israelite could say: Jehovah is my Father.

Again, in Jeremiah xxxi. 9, it is written : "I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born." After all their failure, God does not alter His original purpose about Israel. Though they had been turned out of the land because of their sins, He still says, "I am a Father to Israel." But here again it is the people as a whole who could say, Jehovah is our Father ; not individually, He is *my* Father.

And if you turn back to the prophet Isaiah, you find that beautiful passage in chapter lxiii. 16, where the remnant bless God, saying, "Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not : thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer ; thy name is from everlasting ;" and therefore what He reveals of Himself, expressing what He is, does not alter. The Father of Israel does not alter whatever the failure of His people may be. When they shall be brought back again into their land, their words will be "Doubtless thou art our Father."

But there is a great difference in the way in which the Father is spoken of in the Old Testament and in the New. In the Old, Jehovah is the Father of Israel. In the New, the Father is one Person in the Godhead ; one is the Father ; another the Son ; and another the Holy Ghost. In Matthew xxviii. we get the Lord's own words telling His disciples to "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ;" and then to tell them of *Himself*, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded

you." All the persons of the Godhead are here on an equality. This is the New Testament truth.

It is true that we get the fact that there are Persons in the Godhead in the Old Testament; but these Persons are not expressed by name. A striking passage as to this is in Genesis xix. 24, in connection with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha. Here we have plurality of Persons plainly spoken of, but we have not distinction of the Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that is a New Testament truth. So as the Lord says in the verses we read: "No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." The first who spoke of the Father as distinct from the Son, is the Son Himself, who thus reveals Him; the Father whom He had seen, but whom those to whom He spoke had not seen, as He tells us in John vi. : "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, *he* hath seen the Father," whom *they* could not see. It was an unseen Person He spoke of, but a real Person; and He who spoke was the only One upon earth who had seen Him.

But though the Father has been never seen, He had been *heard*. Three times over in the Gospels the Father's voice had been heard, either speaking to the Son or about the Son.

The first time that the Father's voice was heard was when the Lord Jesus came up out of the water, after He had been baptized by John. Then there was a personal address from the Father to the Son: "A voice came from heaven which said, Thou are

my beloved Son ; in Thee I am well pleased." It was a personal address from heaven, an address from the Father to the Son ; the Father declaring who this was who had been thus baptized ; the virgin's Son, conceived by the Holy Ghost, so that in *that* sense He was the Father's Son, though in another sense He had been His Son from all eternity.

We also get here distinction of the Persons of the Godhead. The Father's voice was heard from heaven. The Son was there present, the One to whom He spoke. And the Holy Ghost was seen, as far as He could be seen : He descended in a bodily shape like a dove, There was now a Person on earth upon whom the Holy Ghost could descend apart from any sacrifice. There was One now on earth on whom the Holy Ghost could abide ; One on whom He could find a resting place ; One who was perfectly holy in His own Person.

The second time that the Father's voice was heard it was not directly addressed to the Son, but to those who were with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration. It is an important truth, that, at the beginning of His ministry, at His baptism, the Father owned Him as His beloved Son ; and then, after He had walked about on earth, after He had been opposed, after He had been buffeted by sinners, the Father's voice was heard again saying : My estimation of Him is unchanged : He is still " My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye Him."

The third time that we hear the Father's voice is in John xii. There we read that, the Lord, speaking of

His death, turned to His Father and said : "Father, glorify Thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." The world did not understand the sound ; they did not discern what that voice said ; they thought it thundered. But the evangelist tells us what the voice said : "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." He had just shewn forth the glory of His name in resurrection-power, in bringing Lazarus forth from his grave ; and He would shortly shew it forth again in raising His beloved Son from the dead.

On these three occasions the Father's voice has been heard on earth, but never has man who has walked on earth seen the Father.

How true were the Lord's words : "No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" ! The disciples felt it was something new ; they felt it was something they had never heard before. It brought to their hearts a sense of relationship to God. Peter and the others could say : To each *one* of us He speaks as if we had a Father in heaven. So they say : "Lord, teach us to pray." Proper prayer to God must be based upon knowledge of God. They had now got the knowledge that not only was God in heaven, but that, as individuals, God was their Father.

From time to time He said to them "*my* Father ;" at other times, "*your* Father ;" again at others, "*the* Father." But what characterised them was, that there was a *birth* tie consciously formed between them and

God. The new revelation that the Son had thus given to them of their relationship, made the forms of prayer they had hitherto used no longer suitable to them as children, so He gave them what is commonly called "The Lord's prayer ;" for God's desire was that every one of His children might know Him and address Him in that confiding way as their *Father*.

As quickened souls, they wanted to know how to address God ; so He told them that it was not to be as in old times. Solomon, as a Jew, could speak of Jehovah as dwelling "in the thick darkness ;" and added, "I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever ;" and could pray Him to "Hear in Heaven Thy dwelling place, and when Thou hearest forgive." But the Lord Himself told the Jews in Matthew that Jehovah had forsaken that house "Behold your house is left unto you desolate." God could not any more dwell in that house in Jerusalem—that house where the Lord will dwell when ruling over His earthly people of Israel ; it was defiled by His people's wickedness. He had dwelt there before its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar ; His glory had been seen in it then ; but, amongst the five things that adorned His holy temple, and were wanting in the days of Ezra, was the Shechinah. It was there no longer. Jehovah did not *dwell* in that temple though He still owned it as His house. So the Lord says to them, "Your house is *left* desolate : " not *made* desolate, but left so as it had been, because they rejected Him. The Shechinah, the cloud of glory, was seen on the Mount, over Him, the only spot where it did then show itself.

The forms of prayer, then, which had been used till the Lord began His ministry, did not now suit the disciples. The Lord therefore taught them to say, "Our Father, which art in heaven."

But it was one thing to say "Our Father" thus, and another thing to say, "Abba, Father," after the Holy Ghost came down to earth. It is because He has come to take up His abode in the hearts of the saints of God, that we are privileged to take up that word, and, in the full confidence of our hearts, to say "Abba, Father." This word in all its full import the saints could not use until the Holy Ghost had come.

In the eighth of John the Jews ask the Lord, "Where is thy Father?" Mark, not *our* Father, nor *the* Father. But it was of "*the* Father" that He spoke to them. The "Jews" are always the worst people in John's Gospel. They did not believe what the Lord had said, and challenged Him to show them *the* Father. We can understand the bearing of His answer now. "Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father : if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also."

But the Father and the Son are quite distinct Persons. What then does the Lord mean by this answer? The answer that He gives to a similar question in John xiv. answers this one too. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life : no man cometh unto the Father but by me." He is the way to the Father. And mark, it does not say *my* Father, but *the* Father. And He adds : "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also ; and from henceforth ye know him and have seen him."

Thus we learn from this, my friend, that if we have not seen the Father, it is because we have not seen the Son who reveals Him. The Father is not to be to us as an unknown Person. We shall see Him some day. I do not understand the thought of being in my Father's house and not seeing my Father. I shall see Him some day, but not upon earth. But even now I know His actions, His ways, His heart. I trace Him in the Lord Jesus Christ. We see what the Lord Jesus Christ was, what was the desire of His heart ; but we learn in all His ways, His works, His words, another person too, and that person is the *Father*.

Who is competent to speak to us of the Father but the Son ? Who knows the Son but the Father, and who knows the Father but the Son ? It is perfectly simple, a child can understand it. In all the Son's ways on earth, the Father is revealed to us ; so that these words in Matthew are true for us. Though we can say we have not *seen* Him, yet He is not to be a stranger to us, for in all the ways of the Lord Jesus Christ we learn to know Him, as the Son has taught us. I cannot show you the Father, but I can show you the ways of the Father. If you want to know what the Father is towards those who have sinned against Him, debtors to His grace and His mercy ; if you want to know what the heart of the Father is towards His saints, His redeemed people, turn to the four Gospels and see. Though I have not seen Him, yet I may say I *know Him*. As the Lord says : " He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

The Lord Jesus Christ speaks of the Father as quite

distinct from Himself ; yet there is the most perfect communion between them. The Son's thoughts are all the Father's, and the Father's are all the Son's. So that we learn in the life of the Lord Jesus here on earth, how near the Father came to us in the Person of His Son. We have to say, He is not an unknown Person to me. His shape I have never seen, His voice I have never heard ; yet I may say, I have known the Father ; I have known Him in the revelation that He has made to me in the Son.

Just for a moment I turn to John vi. Here we get the contrast that there is between the manna in the wilderness, and the bread of God which came down from heaven. The Lord here makes the Father known to the people as the giver of what the soul needs. The bread from heaven is not only given for the sustainment of the saint, but there is also a positive thing for each soul to appropriate individually. It is : " If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever." " And the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. . . . Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." There must be the eating and drinking, the individual appropriation, or there is no life in the soul. Thus the Father is the giver of that bread from heaven, without which we can have no life ; and also that bread which cheers and sustains the heart of the saint as he journeys on through the wilderness. " He that eateth me, even he shall live by me."

And who gives this bread ? It is the Father who comes out as the giver ; as James says, " Every good

gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." Do you ask, Whence do we get it? The answer is, My Father gives it you. He is a giver to those who were lost, who were dead in their sins; He gives them "the bread from heaven which giveth life unto the world." But not only does He give life, but He sustains right on to the end the life which He gives.

And now let us turn back to John iv., where we get the Father in a beautiful character: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him." The Lord Jesus tells the woman "Ye worship ye know not what," because false worship is the worship of demons. In the Lord's day, at the time when He was upon earth, the only place in which God sanctioned worship was Jerusalem. As for the Samaritans, they were worshipping demons; they thought they were worshipping God, but the Lord says, "Ye worship ye know not what."

But the Father is *seeking worshippers*. What a beautiful display is this of the Father! To sinners He gives life; to saints He gives sustainment; and from His people's hearts He seeks worship!

My friend, are we responding to this? It is not here a soul bowed down under the sense of the Father's goodness seeking to pour itself out in worship to that Father. It is *He* who is seeking the worshippers! He delights to see the homage, the adoration, the praise of

worship, rise out of the hearts of His children. True worship is based upon this ; the soul knowing its relation to God, and approaching Him as Father. Is this how we worship—in the full consciousness of the birth tie ? “The Father *seeketh* worshippers.” This is what He desires. “Worshippers in spirit and in truth.” Or as we read elsewhere, worship by *the Holy Ghost*, for it is the Holy Ghost who leads saints forth in worship ; whilst the work of Christ on the cross is the ground on which we stand before God ; the ground on which we come to Him in all the confidence of a child as it approaches its earthly father. It is that simple but expressive cry of *Father*. Are we half alive to this wondrous grace ? Are we half alive to what is in the Father’s heart ? To this love which comes out in John vi. as a giver, and in John iv. as seeking worshippers.

Then again in John x. we read : “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me : and I give unto them eternal life ; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all ; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” That clause, “They shall never perish ” means that there shall be no root or thing in them that can engender perishing. There is no root within because of which they can perish ; and no power from without can pluck them out of His Father’s hand.

It is the character of giver that comes out here too : “My Father, *gave* them me.” And then the abiding security of the sheep. Who can pluck them out of the

Son's hand? Who can pluck them out of the Father's? We see here the power that is exercised towards them.

And what is it makes the sheep of such interest to the Father? It is because they believed on the Son. But there is another reason, namely, they are precious to the Son. We read in John vi. "All that the Father *giveth* me shall come to me." "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which He hath *given* me I should lose nothing." The sheep are the Father's gift to the Son. Before ever the Son had them, they were the Father's; and therefore they are precious to the Son. They are precious to the Father, because they have believed on the Son; and to the Son because they are the gift of the Father.

Then in chapter xvii. we get the desires of the Lord about them. He says, "Holy Father, keep them in thy name which Thou hast given me." "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." As the Father's gift, they are most precious to Him, and therefore He puts them back into the Father's hand to keep while He is absent from them.

And then one more thing comes out in the end of this chapter. If we learn that there is distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and if we know the thoughts for us that are in the heart of the Father, as we see Him displayed in the Son, there is one other thing which the Son wishes us to enter into, and that is the enjoyment of the Father's *love*. He says, "I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."

There *is* parental love. It would be a strange thing for the father not to wish his son to enjoy his love. There was one, the Son, who passed through this scene, enjoying His father's love as He walked about on earth ; and He wants each one of us who can say, "Abba, Father," to enjoy also that love. So He declares the Father's name ; He gives His people to know the birth tie between the Father and themselves.

C. E. S.

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