

CHRIST;

HIS PEOPLE'S PORTION

AND OBJECT.

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THE ROCK AND THE ROD.

Numbers xx. and Deut. xxxiv. 1—7.

I GREATLY desire to call earnest attention to these two chapters for a little this evening, not only because they have a very intimate bearing the one upon the other, but also because you could not find in the whole of the blessed word of God, two chapters which give you more perfect wilderness experience.

I do not know whether you have ever been struck with it, but it is very remarkable that the 20th of Numbers begins with death and ends with death, and it is more remarkable still, that in both beginning and end it is death in the same

family ; Miriam, the sister of Aaron, closes her eyes in death at the commencement of it ; and Aaron, the priest, the brother of Miriam, lays aside his official garments and closes his eyes upon the scene, in the end of it. It is a perfect chapter of wilderness history ; it is in very deed the beginning and end of the wilderness ; it began with death, it ends with death. The brightest day the wilderness ever saw, is tinged by the dark clouds of death ; it separates the musician from the timbrel, for Miriam was the one who led the song in the palmy days of Israel's triumph on the shores of the Red sea, and the loudest above all the notes of praise that were sung in commemoration of Jehovah's victory, was Miriam's voice, " Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." She led the song on that occasion, and now her lips are sealed never to be opened again ; and when you come to the end of the chapter you find a man who stood as the priest, laying aside his priestly robes and bowing to death.

It is well to remember that priesthood always supposes a people in a certain relation with God, as Israel was outwardly ; priesthood always comes in as sustainment or succour for a people who are brought into relation with God, during their journey through the wilderness. I would only allude to this in passing, for I think it important, and useful, and instructive. The atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ, though the act of one who is a priest, is not in itself a priestly act, and the reason I mention that is, because in the 19th of Numbers you will find it was *another* person who was to kill the heifer before the eyes of Eleazar the priest ; the priest himself did not slay the victim, it was slain by another in his presence. The Lord Jesus Christ did not enter upon His priestly functions until He had passed through death and resurrection, and gone into the heavens. He was no priest on earth, “ If He were on earth He should not be a priest ; ” but after He has gone into the heavens, we have Him in the exercise of His everlasting priesthood, founded too upon His

death and resurrection. We find a picture of it in Aaron's rod that budded, which was God's way of silencing the murmurings of rebellious Israel, and hushing the rising murmurs of their hearts. He caused the rod to be laid up before Him in the tabernacle, and the dead rod on the morrow budded and brought forth almonds, etc.; it was typical of priesthood, founded upon death and resurrection, which is the only principle upon which God could bring the people through the wilderness. Moses' rod would never do, because it was symbolical of judicial authority, and hence when God was about to turn the rivers of Egypt into blood, His direction to Moses was, to strike *his* rod over the river; but when we come to the 20th of Numbers, what we find is this, though the blessed God is manifesting, in His dealing with Israel, that they are a rebellious people, still He does not recognize any other rod but one. "Take *the* rod." What rod? Aaron's rod which budded and blossomed; that was *the* rod, the rod of priestly grace, the only power by which God could lead a

rebellious people through the wilderness; if He used the rod of Moses, it would have been destruction after destruction.

What we have in the end of this chapter is Aaron, the man who stood between an outwardly reconciled people and God—God's priest, the man who stood also between the living and the dead, now yielding to the power of death himself. The priest *must* put off his priestly garments, the sweet singer of Israel must lay aside her timbrel, and must go into that great silence that nothing can break: these are the things that go to make up the wilderness; in *it* you ever find the dark cloud, disappointment and death. Israel murmured that they had no water, and even that but reveals the interest, and care, and love, and provision, of Jehovah, who said Himself that He had looked after their clothes and feet forty years in the wilderness: let no one turn away and say we do not act like them, because that is the tendency of all our hearts every moment. The thing that tests us is the

wilderness ; the circumstances of the way are the very things that bring out what is in us. If our eyes are on the living God, we can stand the pressure of wilderness circumstances ; if not, we break down. We are all sooner or later tested—God knows what will test each in their wilderness experience, and He suits the testing to the condition and state of His people, but we are all tested ; you will find it so in Israel, they wanted bread and they murmured ; every circumstance in their history brought out what little confidence or repose of heart they really had in God, and thus the reality of their state comes out. “The people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord, and why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die, and wherefore have ye made us to come out of Egypt to bring us unto this evil place ? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates, neither is there any water to drink.” What a picture !

dissatisfaction, discontent, complaint, and rebellion upon the part of Israel, death in their circumstances, and death in their families; death in their circumstances, for there was no water; and death in their families, for Miriam and Aaron had fallen on sleep; in fact, death on everything. But now observe there is a beautiful contrast here; for if there be in very deed change on everything, yet there are two things in this very chapter that do not change. What are they? The *Rock* and the *Rod*. There you get no change. Aaron may die, Miriam may die, Israel may murmur, the waters may fail, there is nothing, as to earth, that the eye can rest on, but the *Rock* and the *Rod* are the same. It is a blessed thing to learn that; if Miriam, the sweet singer of Israel, fades like a leaf, if Aaron the priest puts his priestly garments upon another and dies under the righteous government of God like the great Moses himself, who has to go up Mount Pisgah, gaze at the goodly land, and then fall on sleep, all liable to death, I look at the

Rock, it is the same, and at the Rod, it is the same.

The Rock is Christ, as the One who was bruised as an atonement for sin, because you remember, on the first occasion when Moses smote the rock, it was a type of Christ lifted up on the cross; I allude to the 17th of Exodus, "Smite the rock and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink,"—because you can have nothing, no good, no blessing, neither salvation nor sustenance, that does not spring out of a smitten Christ—if there is water to come forth from the rock to satisfy the thirst of Israel, typically Christ must be smitten. When I speak of the rock, I speak of Christ as the One who was an atonement for sin. He is the One out of whom everything comes, by Him sin is removed, by His precious death the barrier is removed, and now everything fully comes out; it is not that God had it not in His heart, He had, but righteousness barred the way, and the moment sin is removed all comes out righteously; refreshment, pardon

liberty, in fact, everything. If you trace everything up to its source, you will find all in heaven or on earth, all flows from Christ crucified; He is the Rock, and in another sense the One on whom the heart builds for eternal security. But now *the* Rod is Christ, though in another aspect of His glory, even Christ in the exercise of His priestly grace as the One who is in the heavens; because He is a priest in heaven, not on earth, and He is exercising the functions of His priesthood in heaven. "He is a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec"; that is His order, the functions are Aaronic. The Rod then is typical of priesthood founded upon death and resurrection; and so these are the two things that remain amid all the vicissitudes in Israel's journey, the Rock and the Rod. What a blessed thing it is that no one will ever go to Mount Hor and see Christ strip Himself of His priestly robes and put them upon another! No eyes will ever look upon such a sight as that. Moses himself afterwards must toil up the steep incline of Mount Pisgah to

die in the Mount, having first feasted his eyes upon that which death shut him out of. What a blessed thing it is that we shall never do that! Christ never commits His office to another. He holds it eternally. That is the great and blessed fact in this chapter. As we go through the wilderness, what God would lead us into is, the *sufficiency* of Christ. He is enough—we constantly say He is enough, but then all the way we are proved as to that. The Rock and the Rod are not enough for Israel, and they are ready to malign God who had brought them through, up to that moment. Have our hearts known the sufficiency of Christ? Is all the fulness and the blessedness in Him our competency, so that when we are tested, it may be by the passing away of some creature mercy, it may be by the withering of some gourd, it may be by being stripped like a tree, Christ is enough for us? That is the test; it is in the complete death and desolation of everything here; am I *then* able to say Christ is enough? He is sufficient, all fulness is in Him;

it is not a question of having our needs met, or getting relief. I do not deny that He ministers relief, I know He does ; but that is what Israel's heart was always upon, they were hungry or thirsty, and they wanted relief, they were in that sense always on relief. I don't deny that God gives relief, but I do say there is a higher thing than that, there is the exercise of the heart that it may know, before the relief comes, the need of continued dependence which the hunger and thirst were designed to promote. If Christ is our resource, then we can endure until relief comes ; and do you think the relief is less sweet when it comes if I have been proving the sufficiency of the One whose hand is stretched out to give it me ? On the contrary, it enhances the gift, and in place of measuring His heart by your need, you measure it by His own heart. Christ's own heart is the only measure of itself. If it were otherwise, supposing your necessities are not very great, then the proportion of what is in His heart will be very small ; and am I not to know

Him beyond the mere extent of my necessities and needs? Am I not to know Him on His own side? I am speaking now of what is individual, of what is to be known in the wilderness—a resource, so that if death and decay be on everything around us, we can turn to all and say, “Thank God, there is the Rock and the Rod, and nothing can touch them.”

I would glance a moment at that wherein Moses’s failure consisted at this time. It was this—in giving a false representation of God to Israel—that was simply his sin, he misrepresented God to a rebellious people. Jehovah had said to him, “Take the rod,” *i.e.* Aaron’s rod, symbolical, as I have pointed out already, of priestly grace, “Take the rod, and gather thou the Assembly together, thou and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes.” Now observe how different that is to Jehovah’s word to Moses in Exodus xvii. 5, “And thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thy hand and go.” That was the first occasion; here he was to take

“*the* rod,” and speak to the rock. That is, God was acting in reference to Israel in the unbounded grace of His own heart; it was grace, and priestly grace too, because it is only priestly grace that can bring a murmuring people through the wilderness; whereas Moses, instead of taking *the* rod, takes his own rod, the rod of judgment and government—thus he misrepresented God in every way, he denied in type the one sacrifice of Christ by smiting the rock twice, and he misrepresented the voice of God in speaking to Israel as he did; he stood before the people the very contrast to that character in which God was dealing with them. It is a solemn reality for us at this present moment, in our actings, conversation, and ways down here in this world, that we give a proper representation of Christ; because that is what we are left here for. Are we really exercised as to this manifestation of Christ to men?

The only way the world can see Christ is in His people, who are in the world, for He is gone

away; there is no Christ on this earth, but His people are left here in order that others may both learn and see Christ in them. Are we sufficiently near Him and in communion with His mind to weigh the importance of this? Are we walking in the quietness of His own presence so that we can catch and thus be moulded by His mind, and so naturally and easily express Him? Is it that which now is forming us? Think of Moses, he speaks unadvisedly with his lips; and if we speak unadvisedly with our lips we give, in our way, as far as we can give, a false representation of Christ, and if we are in circumstances where Christ would not be, we so far misrepresent Him. How careful it ought to make us! But a person may say, how can I give a true representation of Christ? You *must* know His mind in order to represent Him. The man who represents another's interests knows what those interests are, and is acquainted with everything about them. Herein is our chief deficiency; there is so little nearness to, and intimacy with Christ, hence we so little

represent Him faithfully in this world. The Lord give us to be near to Christ every moment—it is as you are near to Him that His moral features are in measure reproduced in you. He is the producing power, and, as you are near Him, He produces certain qualities in you, and that is likeness to Christ in our ways. Now here Moses is not the true delineator of God in that sense; and hence he lost Canaan. Two things run all through the word of God, viz., *Grace* and *Government*, and they never interfere the one with the other—both are here; hence it is Moses died. Aaron likewise goes up Mount Hor, and dies, as we have already seen. This is government. Government and grace are going on still; this is government, viz., “Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.” That is as true of a Christian as of a man of the world. It was government that shut Moses out of Canaan, but grace gave him a sight of the goodly land ere he died. Before Moses fell asleep, Jehovah led him up to the top of Pisgah, and traced out with His own hand, as

it were, all the land of promise. What a sight that must have been; think of the blessed God leading His poor servant up the mountain top, and pointing out to the eyes, so soon to close in death, that goodly land. Is that not grace? Was the blessed God in any sense bound to do so? By no means. Yet I am emboldened to say that it gave Jehovah far more pleasure to give his servant that sight than it did even Moses to gaze on it. But Aaron too had failed, and hence it is precisely the same here with him, because he was associated with Moses. No doubt, he was the lesser of the two, yet he must die. The *grace* of God is exhibited in the one who was the leader. No doubt, if we look at it dispensationally, Moses could not bring the people in, the "law" could not bring the people into the land, it made nothing perfect; we do not get that until we come to Joshua; that is another thing, but what I now treat of is *grace* and *government* exhibited in God's ways with Moses and Aaron. Both die in the *government* of God.

One thing in order to shew the contrast that is here; Moses standing on Mount Pisgah, and looking on the land into which he was *not* to enter with Israel, is not the sort of view the Christian now gets of the glories of Christ and the heavenly land; through grace we have title to look at heaven and glory, not as at a distance from us, but as *in them*. If the Spirit of God dwells in us He invites us to Christ in glory; not like Moses, who saw a better thing than he possessed; it must have been in some sense a tantalizing thing to him, and that is why people are in a sense tormented by looking at the glory. When you speak of a place where everything is in perfection, you must be tantalized by it if you do not know that it is yours, if you have no sense of possession of it; but if you are a Christian, all is yours. A Christian is a person in whom the Holy Ghost dwells, and hence one with Christ in the place where Christ is. Why should people, then, be tantalized? Why should the blessedness of union with Christ in heaven make any soul think it is not possible to know it?

The blessed Lord Himself looking on to the day of the presence of the Holy Ghost on the earth says, "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." (John xiv. 20). No doubt it is all wonderful, yet, if Christians, we are one with Christ, and it is not looking at the thing as from a distance, but looking at that into which we have been brought; and be assured the difference is great as to whether we are looking at the things of Christ as Moses looked at Canaan from Mount Pisgah, or as being brought into the very centre of it; because if the Holy Ghost dwells in us, He unites us to Christ where He is, and I therefore say we are brought into it. Then besides all this, we have here what is peculiar to the wilderness—"the Rock" and "the Rod"—the Rock on which we may build for eternal security, even as the scripture expresses it—"A man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

(Isa. xxxii. 2). That all belongs to the wilderness, because there will not be any heat or want of water in heaven. Thus then this weary desert is the very place to elicit the hidden virtues of the mystic Rock and Rod, the Rod that blossomed and budded (type of the resurrection of Christ), to carry a poor feeble one along, our murmurings all quieted and silenced, and taken away, and we led so blessedly along, until we shall have changed the dry and parching sand of the deserts for the blessedness of Christ's own presence.

The Lord give us to know the reality of this Rock and Rod, when Miriam the prophetess and Aaron the priest die—because this is real wilderness life; Israel murmur, Miriam and Aaron die, the waters fail, but the Rock and the Rod remain the same, and that which is wanting in everything else, viz., sameness, is the glory of this. The absence of this stamps everything here in the wilderness as faulty and deficient, but when we come to Christ, what do we find? “Jesus

Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

The Lord by His Spirit give our hearts to prove Him the same day by day, for His own name's sake!



“THE FATHER OF MERCIES, AND THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT.”

(2 Corinthians i.)

THERE is a very close connection, and yet a striking contrast, between the circumstances in which the apostle is found, in chapters i. and xii. of this Epistle. In chap. i., he is, we may say, altogether in human circumstances, surrounded by straits, difficulties, and trials, which came upon him no doubt in his service; he was in circumstances in no way peculiar to him, but which might be ours at any time. But in chap. xii. he was altogether in God's circumstances, taken up into the third heaven, and then sent back into this world to go through it as a crippled man.

He gets a thorn in his flesh because God would have Paul entirely in His strength. At some time or other we might be called to go through, in our measure, what we find in chap. i. Chap. xii. save the expression, "a man in Christ," is entirely an exceptional case; God having a distinct purpose towards His servant in connection with His ministry; still, although we may not be caught up into Paradise as he was, we do get thorns in the flesh.

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (i. 3). What strikes one here is, the apostle begins the opposite way from that in which most would begin. If *we* had anything to relate as he had, we should have started with our troubles and pressures, and gone on perhaps to tell of the comfort and consolation ministered by God to us; but the apostle begins with the source of all comfort, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies." Thus he begins at the fountain head, and not at the stream; he comes

down to the stream, "that we may be able to comfort;" he did not go up to God from that, but from God Himself he came down, to the comfort he ministered. It makes an immense difference at what end we begin. We find broken hearts in this world, it is the very scene to meet them in; who can bind them up but God Himself? But we must take care not to make our need the measure of His comfort; if you make your troubles, or sorrows, or difficulties, the measure of anything that is in God, you limit to that what is in Him.

There was One who had *unmeasured* trouble and sorrow here, and only One—the blessed Lord to *us*, all is measured out, either God-given, or God-permitted, sorrow. He puts on us only what He sees needful for us. There is no temptation, but that which is common to man. God will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able. He knows exactly what the vessel is able to bear. He puts the right amount on it, and then places His own blessed strength, as it were, under it,

and so helps us to carry it. *All* goes on under His hand, no amount of God-given consolation, in the midst of the troubles we pass through, could ever be the measure of what is in God's heart, so the Apostle breaks out with "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," who is the source of it all. Then we find the relationship, "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,"—this defines the relationship we are in to Him, and then adds, "the Father of mercies." He is the spring and source of every mercy—it is *all* mercy, mercy every step of the way; every trouble is mercy, *all* His way with us is *mercy*. Paul begins with God; he starts from the holy glorious person of the blessed God Himself,—all in Him is perfect fulness, divine sufficiency; and then the Apostle comes down to what He does, "who comforteth us," etc. The Apostle is passed through all he speaks of here in order that he might be able to minister it to others. The servant is passed through many an exercise and difficulty, many a pressure and trial, often not so

much for himself as for those he would serve under Christ. He produces in the servant that character which it is His object to develop by means of his service. He puts the servant in the stocks, as it were, that he may be able to come forth and say,—“Oh, I have tasted the mercy of God as ‘the God of all comfort.’ ”

We never can get sympathy from others while they themselves are in the same circumstances; when they have passed through them, they are fitted to help and comfort us. Some say,—“You cannot sympathize with me, because you are not in the same circumstances;” but if it were so, they could not sympathize, because they would be engrossed with their own trouble. How often in trouble, people claim to be shut up to themselves; they think none can understand, but after any one has passed through it, he can draw near to those in sorrow, and tell them of the comfort wherewith he has been comforted.

There must be school time in God’s family, and everything must be fully tested and proved.

If walking with God, are we not conscious of how little we are able to help one another? Painful it is to see how well able we appear to be to find the weak points in one another. To tell a man he is at the bottom of a deep ditch is one thing, but it is quite another to be able through grace to take him out of it. We must know the hand and heart of God, and His sustaining power for ourselves, and then we can meet others in their varied circumstances, and like a skilful physician, we shall know the relative value of each medicine, and be apt to apply them. He must have gone to school in order to learn, and so must *we*, as it were, walk this great hospital of suffering, that is, this present world, and taste the balm of consolation ourselves, ere we can commend it to others.

God was thinking of the Corinthians, *they* were in His mind, and therefore He says, as it were, I will take my servant and pass him through the heights and depths, through every variety of circumstance. (2 Cor. xi.) For what purpose?

In order that I may display *in him* the power of Christ, and in order that the same power may go out through him and reach the Corinthians. Paul is afflicted for the sake of the Corinthians ; this makes the position of the servant of Christ very solemn—the servant ought to be ready for everything. Some act as if they thought they could carry the world before them ; they are applauded, made much of. This is the world's notion—the thought in Scripture of a servant is, one who *suffers*, not one who reigns, who goes through pressure and difficulty, evil report and good report. (2 Cor. vi.) He ought to be one who has such a hold upon God, and who has God so before him, that he can say, “Here am I, send me,” content to be placed in the furnace, that out of a broken heart, he may be able to minister the consolations of God. Was it said to Paul, “I will show him how great things he must do?” No,—but what he must *suffer* for My name's sake. It is not only a man's gift, or his words, but God takes up a man's person, and puts him into every sort

of up and down, that he may stand by the afflicted ones, and say, "This was my comfort in my sorrow." It is a lonely, quiet, unnoticed, and unknown path, but one of most precious blessing. When a person has lost his reputation, his good name, if ever he had one, not only in the world, but even among the saints, when a person is in the shade, in the deeps with Christ, it is an opportunity to see how near He can come to him. "At my first answer, no man stood with me," he was absolutely alone, and he had not a hard thought about one of them. "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." "The Lord stood with me." Paul proved what God was. The time to learn the power, and the comforts, and the consolations, of Christ is the time when they are wanted, so "out of the eater comes forth meat," &c.

Ver. 8. There is another thing, God has a reason in it all—a reason on *our* side for all the difficulties and troubles, and a reason on *His own side*.

First, on our side.—Take Adam, innocent in the

garden of Eden, he did not know what exercise was,—if we had no will against God, we should not have exercise; the stronger our will, the greater the needs be for exercise. If a person says, “I never go through exercise,” I should much fear he is led by his own natural will, because we have two natures in us, and “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.” Though you may not be conscious of it, your will may have gained the upper hand; the amount of exercise then is proportionate to the amount of will; Adam, innocent, had no exercise for a time, he does God’s will; but we spring from Adam fallen, though now we are in Christ, and our only power is by the Holy Ghost dwelling in us. Thus God puts His servant through death and resurrection, “we had the sentence of death in ourselves.” He puts us into death that we may trust Him who is the resurrection, and know Him who is *the life*; this exercise keeps us on the watch, and subjugates us in many ways. Trouble is intended to subdue and

quiet us, otherwise there is ever the danger that our will may be active. God has no cure for it but death; our part is to bear about in our "body the dying of Jesus." *God's* part is to deliver us to death, and *we* apply the death of Christ to ourselves. Whatever He died to, is the measure of what we must renounce. God hands us over to death that we should not trust in ourselves: a man drowning needs a saviour and a deliverer,—rescue and help must come from outside. Never is the bright morning of resurrection known in the soul, except as we have passed through the gloomy night of death, then what awaits us is the bright resurrection morn. The disciples met Jesus on the shore; in this case He had gone through death *for* them, and they found He had everything prepared for them as delivered from death. *We* must go through the gloomy night, and the darkness of the grave; we must, as it were, be invested with the shroud, and go into the tomb, but only that we may come forth and bloom in resurrection beauty. I should be sorry to make anyone

gloomy or depressed. We have nothing to do but to be passive in His hand and not in anywise to be analysing the death we must pass through. May God keep each eye on the resurrection morning. He is the God of the living; *resurrection* and glory is God's great thought both for our *bodies* in future, as well as for our spirits now. He does for us morally in our history now what He will do literally in our bodies by and by; hence we go into death, in order that through it we may come out into the bright morning of resurrection. But there is *God's side* as well as ours; I say it with all reverence, these things are God's opportunity; His heart of love never overlooks the wants and woes of His own; there are no broken hearts, or weeping eyes, in heaven; and if there were no trouble here, we should be debarred the knowledge of how God Himself can draw near to the broken-hearted one, and bind up his wounds. He says, as it were, "See how I can comfort you!" as He said of Israel whom He has never given up, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I com-

fort you.” It is evident enough how on our side there is necessity that we should have trials and sorrows, but if we think of the wilderness, its difficulties, exercises and griefs, we can also blessedly understand how they afford Him an occasion of displaying *His* tenderness amid them all to us while in them, that He may prove to us how equal to every occasion His grace is, and how entirely He can go through every thing with us. “I have surely *seen* the affliction of My peoplehave *heard* their cry.....I *know* their sorrows.” He is all eye, all ear, and all knowledge, when His people are afflicted, cry, or are sorrowful.

There will be no occasion to display *this* grace in heaven ; there, the absence of sorrow, suffering, and death will mark that scene, just as their presence here marks this poor world. What a sight to faith ! God turning the sorrows and afflictions of this poor world to His own account, and displaying in them a tenderness and compassion that overlooks none. He delights to show how He can heal a broken heart, as well as sustain a

weak body. The first is not beyond Him, the second is not beneath Him.

You remember how Joseph felt when his brethren doubted him, and gave him no credit for the affection of his heart; his brethren reasoned thus, "Now Jacob our father is dead, Joseph will hate us, and requite us all the evil ~~we~~ have done to him;" they thought of him as they would have acted; and he wept. Did he reprove them, or speak harshly to them? He spake kindly, or as in the margin, "he spake to their heart." We read in Hosea ii. 14, "I will *allure* her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her, and I will give her her vineyards from thence."

Thus we see how that, *literally*, death will be Jehovah's way of dealing with Israel in the future, as it is the way of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ with His people, *morally*, now.

May the Lord graciously incline our hearts by His Spirit to accept His own blessed perfect ways with each one of us, for the Lord Jesus Christ sake!

THE TREASURE, VESSEL, AND POWER.

(2 Cor. iii. and iv.)

THERE has been a ministry on this earth, which had its day and purport in the mind of God; it was introduced at Mount Sinai by Moses; it carried the law, which claimed righteousness from man, and was in form written on stone; it was thereby the knowledge of sin came in, and consequently it became a ministration of condemnation and death. It is to this ministry these words refer, viz., “If the ministration of death, written and engraven on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done

away, how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious."

It is of the deepest importance to remember that this ministry was suited to bring out the unwelcome but solemn truth, that the trial of man in the flesh only displayed his entire and complete ruin; not only had man come short of the glory of God, but the reflection of that glory in the face of the mediator, carrying with it, as it did, the claim for righteousness from man, repelled him instead of attracting; the glory of God in the face of Moses, had the same effect as "the sound of the trumpet and the voice of words" at Mount Sinai. With regard to the first, Israel demanded that Moses should hide his face; with respect to the other, they entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more.

Moreover, this ministry being, as has been said, one of claims and demands from man in the flesh, it could never be formative in character or power; indeed, it would cease to be of its own

nature were it to produce in man that which it claimed from him under the sanction of condemnation and the curse. To sum up, then, respecting this ministry, its sphere was the earth, its character, a principle of claim and demand, and its issues, bondage and death.

Now the contrast to all this is, what is entitled in chapter iii. the ministry of the Spirit, as well as the ministration of righteousness, and the great point in the contrast is that what the first claimed, the second carried with it. The source of this ministry too, was very different from the former, as was also its basis. Its basis was the accomplished victories of the Son of God, who as Son of Man, glorified God on the earth, and finished the work which was given Him to do. It is to this blessed culmination of all His obedience, He Himself refers as follows, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him." (John xiii. 31, 32).

We know that this was spoken in anticipation of the sufferings and judgment of the cross, as well as the blessed proclamation, in resurrection and ascension, of how completely and fully He had glorified His God and Father. The basis then of this ministry from the heavens was the perfected atonement of the Lamb of God; therein was demonstrated the truth and love of God, as never declared before; therein was established a righteousness before God for man, in perfect accordance with the claims of His throne; and therein was judged sin, the world, and Satan. True it is, that He, in Whose precious death all this was made good, died to establish it before God in consistency with His nature, yet He was raised from the dead on the third day by the glory of the Father, afterwards ascended into heaven, and is not only the one Man now before God,—“the last Adam”—but the One in and from Whose face the whole glory of the Lord now shines.

But there is even more contrast in the conse-

quence of these two ministries, for the effect of the first was bondage and condemnation, as well as the entire absence of anything approaching to likeness to the mind and thoughts of God; it were impossible for the law from Sinai to be in any sense formative in its nature or effects; in truth we may say plainly, that if it in any sense *imparted* to man, it would cease to be what it was in principle, a *demand* upon man; but not so this ministry from the heavens, the very nature of which is to impart and thus to be formative. In this respect its contrast with the law is its glory. By what it ministers, viz., righteousness, and the Spirit, the believer is competent both as to title and power to gaze at the full and undimmed glory of God, as seen in the face of Jesus Christ, and thus the formative power of this ministry is maintained. Righteousness and the Spirit are the basis, transformation into the same image from one degree of glory to another is the result. What a blessed, wonderful ministry! Well may our hearts exclaim—Surpassing glory! excelling glory!

Now it is perfectly clear that, as another has truly expressed it—"A man of like passions with us, he (Paul), was one who in a wonderful manner lived with God so as to carry out this ministry; he (Paul) laboured more abundantly than they all. Still what he ministered we receive; only he was a vessel filled in more than ordinary degree. But this same blessed truth, as it especially regards the testimony, is committed to us, whatever the sphere, whether the greatest as an instrument or the least, and therefore the thing that he ministered is ours, so that we are vessels, each one in his own little measure, of that with which he was filled."

It is very instructive to see in the case of Paul, the double character of testimony, if I may so say, which he was, as a vessel, called to bear. We read in Acts xxvi. 16, "But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee."

We learn from this he was to be a minister and a witness, if I rightly apprehend the mind of the Spirit of God ; the expression “witness” meaning that he was to exemplify practically what he ministered. What a wondrous calling, beloved friends,—poor, feeble, failing man on this earth, now the vessel, and the “chosen vessel” of heavenly glory, was to be in his own person the expression, as a witness, of that ministry to which he was called by the Son of God, whom he had seen in the way. I cannot conceive anything more wonderful than the testimony of a witness ; all are not called to be ministers, but I submit that every saint is called to be a witness, and I am bold to say the most telling and weighty ministry at this present time, is the silent, noiseless, but explicit unfolding in one’s own person of this heavenly testimony. Oh, to be more like clay in the hands of the potter ; shaped and fashioned by His blessed hand as He Himself pleases. The purpose of God as to His people being His witnesses here on the earth, is their being so controlled and handled

by Himself, that He can point to them as the living testimony to what His own Son from glory can effect for His people on this very earth. Now in chapter iv., where the subject of the ministry is pursued practically in every detail, we find in verse 7, three distinct subjects, viz. :—"this treasure," "earthen vessels," "surpassingness (excellency) of the power." It is on my heart to say a little on each of these.

"We have this treasure." I do not believe "this treasure" is intended to express the value of the possession to him who has it, valuable though it be, but the intrinsic blessedness of the thing itself: this treasure is described in verses 4 and 6; it is, according to verse 4, "the radiancy of the glad tidings of the glory of the Christ," as well as in verse 6, "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." What a treasure to enrich us, as well as for us to be enriched by! Nor is it less wonderful and blessed the way in which we are taken possession of by it, hence we read—"The God who spake that, out of darkness, light should

shine, has shone in our hearts.” The possession of this treasure is nothing less than a revelation of the Saviour in glory in us; producing, as illustrated in the history of the Apostle himself, a moral revolution in the subject of it: this, and this alone, takes the brilliancy out of the best here. I ask, can you say, as the Apostle did, “We have this treasure?”

The next subject is the vessel, and the contrast is sharply marked between the treasure and the vessel in which it is lodged; nothing could be more significant than the expression, “earthen vessels,” *i.e.*, perishing vessels of clay; in human things, man looks out for a casket commensurate with the value and beauty of his treasure; so much so, that the brilliancy of the treasure is often obscured by the magnificence of the casket,—but far otherwise is it with God; in His eye the treasure is everything, and the vessel is selected with a view to the display of the treasure; it is not the vessel holding the treasure, but the treasure governing the vessel, and dis-

playing itself through the vessel. Could anything be more blessed ? In verses 8 and 9, are set forth the inward and outward exercises to which the vessel is subjected, with a view to the display of the treasure. Then in verse 10, we have the only power in our hands by which we can have common thought with God in His purpose for displaying this treasure through us ; hence we read, “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.” Observe, it is not our dying, but the dying of Jesus, the practical application of the cross to every part of us ; the death which alone could set us free from all that was against us being now used by us to silence all that would interfere with the display of the life of Jesus in our mortal flesh. Wonderful object, wonderful power for accomplishing it ; glory the starting point, but death the only road back to glory, and Christ the goal ! And as we travel that road back to the heaven we have come from, His blessed purpose about us on the way is, to display His own Son in each one of His people, this costly,

blessed treasure, placed designedly in these poor earthen vessels of ours.

Lastly, we have a power working as well as a treasure shining, hence we have the word “that the surpassingness of the power may be of God and not of us.” What wonderful contrasts are thus grouped together by the Holy Ghost; the costliest conceivable treasure to shine out through an earthen vessel, by the surpassingness of Almighty power!

This power, too, is displayed, at this present time, so differently from what we would naturally conclude; there are two scriptures which speak of it in the manner of its energy, viz., Col. i. 2., “Strengthened with all might according to the power of His glory unto all patience (endurance), and longsuffering with joyfulness.” These are the elements in which surpassing power declares itself in earthen vessels at this present time. The other scripture is 2 Cor. xii. 9, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me”—*i.e.*,

“may pitch its tent over me.” What a calling, beloved brethren, vessels in whom such a treasure shines, weak and feeble in ourselves, but so held by the treasure, and so wrought in and upon by surpassing power, Almighty energy, that Christ and Christ alone is seen and heard ; and each circumstance on the road to the Father’s house, used up by Himself, and wonderful to say, by us too, in fellowship with Him, that He may be magnified in our bodies whether by life or by death. The Lord awaken our hearts to the dignity and glory of such realities, for Christ’s sake !



OUR PLACE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

It would be impossible to overrate the importance of the two great subjects which I propose to consider; they lie at the basis of all true practical Christianity. It is equally important to understand the relation of the one as the other; indeed, so essential is such apprehension, that it may be safely affirmed that, where the first is not known, the second does not follow. With regard to the place of the saint now, it is first of all to be understood that it is the exact contrast to all that belongs to nature. As born into the world, we are lost, and in that state we have contracted guilt, and we are moreover in a world into which death has entered, and where death is

rampant. By nature then our condition is miserable, and this world, where we find ourselves, is both blasted and blighted, and, from the standpoint of "under the sun," the testimony must be, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Now out of this wretchedness and misery, God in mercy purposed to deliver us, and has accomplished all that was in His heart, in and through His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. But deliverance out of our misery, most full and blessed though it is, was not all His purpose, but introduction into all the blessedness of an open heaven through deliverance, and union by the Holy Ghost with Him who died, and rose again, and ascended up on high. It is very wonderful how apt we are to limit what was in God's heart for us, and what has been accomplished and secured by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and it is this very limit, beyond which so many never get, which is productive of the very painful and low type of practical walk to be seen all around us. It may perhaps startle the

reader at first, to be told that forgiveness of sins is not of itself power, nor can forgiveness of itself enable a man, *i.e.*, give him power, to walk so as to please God. Forgiveness is relief, and blessed and needed relief too ; but power relates to my place in Christ, and the portion I have in Him. For example, when we read in Col. iii. 5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth," &c., it is an exhortation flowing out of the place we are in, and that place, as expounded in Col. ii. and iii., is dead and risen with Christ.

It is all important and blessed to see that I get both relief and power from Christ. The first relates to how He meets me in my deep need ; the second has to do with the new place in Himself, into which He has brought me. Both are most blessedly expounded in the parable of the Good Samaritan, viz., "bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast," &c. It is amazing how few there are who have laid hold by faith of the fact that the Christian has been transferred to an entirely new

condition and place, in and by Christ; that a Christian is a man after another order of being altogether, sprung from the second Adam now, as surely as, by nature, he was of the first Adam. Oh, what a reality to the soul is the deep blessedness of the fact that, as a Christian, I am now part of Him who said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." (John xii. 24.) Who can overrate the magnitude of the fact that, as a Christian, I am sprung from Him—part of that fruit which His death has brought forth?

Then another truth, akin to this, and closely allied with it is, that a man in Christ no more belongs to this world than he does to the man who, upon it, fell. The same precious death which severed his connection with the one, has equally severed it with the other. This world, this ordered system, which Satan is heading up against God and His Christ, is no more my place; by the Cross it has been crucified to me,

and I to it, by a double death, as it were, a judicial sentence passed upon it, and me. I am for ever liberated from the slavery of being its friend. Blessed, wonderful emancipation ! reaching up to the full tide of blessedness, when it is stated that His place, the One who has risen from the dead, has become, in sovereign grace, and by union with Him there, ours, who are quickened together with Christ, raised up together, and seated together in heavenly places in Christ. There remaineth nothing more for us to desire, save to see Him face to face, and, in a body of glory like His own, to be with Him for ever. In the presence of such manifested purpose and favour, so wonderfully accomplished by Him, and bestowed upon us, the soul bows down in adoring wonder, worship, and praise.

These two great kindred truths of which I have spoken, are very blessedly expounded in Ephesians ii. There the Christian is looked at as out of man, and out of earth. In the closing verses of chapter i., Christ, viewed as the glorious

Man, is set forth as the subject of the working of the mighty power of God, "who raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." Oh, the amazing brightness of the glory which shines in every line of this magnificent declaration! If God had a man to turn out of Eden for disobedience, He has also had a Man to reward, who glorified Him on the earth, even to death, the death of the cross. He it was, and none else, who was raised and glorified, and all things set under His feet, and He, constituted "Head over all things to the Church, His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."

Then in chapter ii., we are introduced to the same power in operation, quickening the heirs,

to give them a part and a place, in and with Him, so glorified and exalted: and in order to set forth the blessed reach of this power, the position in which they are found is unfolded, viz., dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit working in the children of disobedience; out of this state of death and distance from God, His power quickened them, so that they have been also raised up together, and seated together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And in the ages to come, God will display in them the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness towards them through Christ Jesus. Then in verse 11, He contrasts the two states, “At that time,” referring to their old condition, “ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, but now,” referring to their new condition, “in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off, (*i.e.*, dis-

pensationally, for, morally, a Jew was no nearer than a Gentile), are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Blessed contrast, and still more blessed Person, in Whom and by Whom it has been all made good and secured !

There are some consequences which follow from our being consciously in this place, which I will note here. There is superiority to circumstances, as we pass along through this world, and there is rest amid the turmoils and troubles to which we are ever subjected in a region like this. Nothing can carry the soul into the atmosphere of superiority and rest, but the divine consciousness, by the Holy Ghost, of our place in Christ, and our union with Him in glory. When these are so possessed, known, and enjoyed, rest and superiority follow as divine consequences. No amount of effort can secure either ; they are not to be acquired by any artificial struggle ; effort always betrays weakness, and carries restlessness in its bosom. There is nothing more distressing to witness than the morbid and oppressed strivings of

real and earnest souls after that which they make as truly a matter of attainment, as the sincere legalist does eternal life. The truth is, if a man is a Christian, he is in Christ, where Christ is, and the Holy Ghost dwells in him. He is out of man, and out of earth. Is there no sanctifying power in this, where it is really and divinely apprehended and known? I do not speak now of the mere assent of the understanding, but of the soul truly operated upon by these divine verities. The question has often been suggested to my own soul, whether there is not a danger of displacing the truth of God, by making us less the subjects of the Holy Ghost's power by means of the truth, and more the active party in the matter. I believe there is a tendency in many of us in this direction, and I cannot conceive any result that can follow, save failure of a serious nature. I do not for a moment deny that there is to be on our part dependence and subjection, and that, too, kept alive constantly in our soul. All this most surely must be found in connection with what I have already

spoken of, as well as “bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body,” *i.e.* the practical application of the death of Christ to ourselves; but this in no sense traverses the truth we have been considering, but, on the contrary, coincides and unites with it. Self-occupation, and “bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus,” are as distinct as midnight and noonday; the latter, known, would strike at the root of the former. Self-occupation is an indigenous plant; it is not only, in one of its aspects, the noxious weed, which grows rank in many a field, and which is branded and shunned, as such, by almost all; but it is also, in another of its aspects, the apparently beautiful flower which fain would blossom, and give forth a refreshing sweetness, and invite the passer-by to pluck and regale himself with its rich perfume.

Another consequence which follows from knowing our place in Christ, is, practical separation from all around us. In proportion to the sense

we have of being at home in heaven, do we practically walk, as from home, here on the earth. No one can make himself a pilgrim; no one can acquire strangership on the earth. The spirit and mind of Christ, as well as familiarity with the place where He is, as our home, alone can impart the tone and character of pilgrims to us.

Another consequence of our place, known and possessed in the power of the Holy Ghost, is the manner in which *everything* connected with us, over which we have authority, is shaped and formed, so as to suit the truth which has suited us to itself. Our home relationships, our families, are not to be, and will not be exceptions in any wise, if the truth lays hold in power on ourselves. How deplorable the failure amongst us in this respect; the world, sought for the families of those who had surrendered it for themselves; prosperity, in respect of it, gloried in, even where this very success was Satan's blindfold to delude and destroy. After this fashion, many a testimony has been ruined, many a one, alas has the sorrowful

confession to make, viz: "They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept." Alas, the children, the families, and households of the saints, are a great reproach to the testimony. Other instances I could bring forward, but enough ; it is self-evident that, if this heavenly position is maintained, neither pride, nor love of the world, nor love of money, will be tolerated ; it will operate upon us in every direction and on every side ; it will permeate everything ; it will be seen in everything ; both forming and maturing that which is of Christ in each of His beloved people. The Lord give us to know this truth in reality in these last days !

OUR PORTION, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

As we have just been considering our Place and the results of it, where it is consciously known and enjoyed in the soul, it would seem suitable to consider the Portion of the saint now, and some of its corresponding consequences.

I trust we have clearly seen that our standing and place are in the second Adam, where He is, and not in any sense in the first. If this be not apprehended in the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, everything else will be both vague and feeble; it is the divine platform upon which, in grace, we are set, and where we are maintained

by the Spirit, in order to our enjoying and using all that is ours in Christ.

There is a double danger, which it seems suitable to indicate here. First,—measuring the greatness and blessedness of what we have in Christ, where He is, by any enjoyment of ours, be it ever so elevated; being in fact so one-sided about it, as to lead people to suppose that the possession of it depended upon the use of it, or the enjoyment of it.

Secondly,—overlooking the fact that earnestness and diligence of soul, prayerful dependence of heart upon the Lord, and counting on the energy of His Spirit, are all necessary in order that I may appropriate and use what is mine already; and thus discover the good of what is mine; like a man entitled to large estates, who never knew the value of his property until he lived on it, and worked it.

It is an important thing to preserve the balance of truth in our souls, and to give every part of God's Word and revelation its divinely ordered

place. Our Portion, then, is Christ Himself! And what a portion !

Now, while it is blessedly true, that it is not in our power to forfeit the possession of our Portion, or to lose it by any folly of ours, it is equally true that the realization of its blessedness, the satisfaction of enjoying it, the consciousness of our union with Him who is our Portion, all depend upon ourselves. It is only by the Holy Ghost who dwells in us that we have power. If He be grieved, His witness in this respect is for the time lost to us; in that case He witnesses against us, that the failure which we have allowed may be judged, and He be free once more to pass the glories of Christ before our souls, and occupy us with them ; thus have we fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, and thus our joy is full.

It is also important to observe that our Portion is our Object ; that which marks Christianity specially is, that we are furnished with an Object in heaven, and a power in us and with us on the

earth. Nothing of this kind was ever known under the law; it proposed no object outside of wicked self, and it supplied no power to meet its requirements, which were backed up with condemnation and death. The new order of things tells of power at every turn, the power of God quickening, raising us up, seating us in heavenly places in Christ, our Portion and Object, and "working in us." (Ephesians iii. 20.) That is to say, power surrounds us on every hand, but power equally works in us for the realization of the enjoyment of that for which power has laid hold of us.

Now, it is important to remember that neither enjoyment nor realization are our Portion or Object, and yet the more earnestly our souls are fixed upon Him who is both, we do realize and enjoy, "Beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, (2 Cor. iii. 18,) secures two things to us:—

First.—Satisfaction of heart with Him on whom the eye of the soul is steadfastly fixed.

Second.—Transformation into the same image,

from one degree of glory to another,—moral likeness to our Object and Portion.

Stephen in Acts vii., is a fine illustration of all this. Filled with the Spirit, he steadfastly gazed into the opened heavens, and there his eye was filled with Jesus in glory, his Portion and Object! No strife or clamorous uproar, which, like a wall of fire, encircled him around, could prevail to turn his eye or heart from that blessed One who Himself filled them. No; he “looked up steadfastly into heaven.” There was his place, his home, his Portion, he is satisfied and at rest here on earth, from which he must shortly depart; he shares the fortunes of a rejected, crucified Christ; hatred, enmity, and violence here, are the counterpart of rest and satisfaction there, and to him, too, they are the consequence of it; these he accepts as those he enjoys. It is a wonderful scene to us, but how heaven must have looked down upon it, who can tell? But this is not all; not only does he behold, but he is like the One into whose blessed face he looks; like Him who

said, "Father, forgive them;" he too, says, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Truly, it is so; "beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord," he was "transformed into the same image from glory to glory."

There is a beautiful illustration of our subject in Leviticus vii. 34, where we find that the wave breast and heave shoulder of the peace offering were the appointed portion of Aaron and his sons. "The wave breast and the heave shoulder have I taken of the children of Israel, from off the sacrifices of their peace-offerings, and have given them unto Aaron the priest, and unto his sons, by a statute for ever, from among the children of Israel." What excellent things are here for faith to feed upon!

The strength and the affections of Christ, as well as Himself in whom is our all, are the blessed Portion of His people. Of old, it was said of Israel, "The Lord's portion is His people." Now, in the highest way, we can say, "The Lord is my portion, O my soul," "Christ is all and in all."

“My Lord, my life, my rest, my shield,
My rock, my food, my light;
Each thought of Thee doth constant yield
Unchanging, fresh delight.”

I shall very briefly note some of the consequences which would follow from all this.

1st.—With such a Portion, things here would be eclipsed, and esteemed as dung and dross. The knowledge of Christ Jesus is the most excellent of all sciences; the possession of Him, true riches. Thank God, there is what another has designated as “the expulsive power of a new affection,” and, for the heart possessing this Portion, and possessed by it, earthly themes now cease.

An incident in David’s history is an apt though poor type of all this. When David returned to his own house after the death of Absalom, among the first to meet and bid him welcome, was Mephibosheth, the son of Saul. With genuine and true hearted loyalty, he carried in his very person the evidences of David’s absence, while he was as yet away (2 Sam. xix. 24); but now

that the king has come again to his own home in peace, Mephibosheth's cup is full; his Portion was in David himself; and because it is so, even the good things of David, the bounties and favour of his hand, can he let go with a willing heart. "Yea, let him take all; forasmuch as my lord is come again in peace unto his own house."

2nd.—One other consequence is, the way in which every part of our history here is used up by us to show the good of what we have in our Portion; there is not one trial too many, not one sorrow too grievous, for the heart that is possessed by Christ, to manifest the value and blessedness of Him who is our Portion, and our compensation in every grief and perplexity. May the Lord give us to abound and have all things, in having Himself, until we see His face, are like Him, and with Him for ever!

SURPASSING GLORY AND SURPASSING POWER.

(2 Cor. iii. 7—iv. 9.)

THERE is a great contrast introduced in this third chapter between the ministry which had its day on this earth and that ministry which is now in progress, and, I may say, very near its close. It is of importance to understand what is the character and nature of these two ministries. They are in complete contrast, the former not answering in any measure to the latter. There is a distinct and definite ministry from heaven at this present moment, which has for its object a forma-

tive character in God's people. There are two things that stand out very prominently in this ministry in contrast with the former ministry ; and when I speak of that, of course I refer to that which was instituted on this earth at Mount Sinai, given to Moses with a distinct and highly definite purpose of God in it. These two things which mark the present ministry from the heavens are quite apart from, and not to be found in, the ministry from Sinai. They are spoken of in this third chapter, and cannot have escaped your attention : they are *liberty* and a *formative efficiency*. These are the great characteristics of the present ministry. I will speak presently of what the purpose of God is with respect to the character which this is intended to produce in God's people ; but these are the two great features of it : liberty in contrast with bondage, and a formative power in contrast with the entire absence of anything of the kind in the ministry from Sinai.

To be simple about it : when the ministry of Sinai came, it was embodied in the ten command-

ments, which were written upon tables of stone, and were given by God in the character of one who was making a demand upon man as he was, he being incompetent to answer to it. That was the special characteristic of it. It was God demanding; God come to look for that which man had not to give. He looked, for instance, for righteousness, but man had none; He looked for a character suitable to Himself in the then revelation of His character, but man had not that suitability; and the consequence was that man, being unable and incompetent to render to God what God was claiming from him, fell under the condemnation and power of death which was attached to that ministry. Hence it was "the ministration of death." (chap. iii. 7.)

And that must be always a ministry of death which makes a demand upon man in the flesh. I do not care what it is; even the most exalted ministry that could be conceived from the heavens, if that ministry were to come and claim from us on the ground of what we are, it would be a min-

istration of death, just as Sinai ministry was. The moment a demand is made upon man as he is, that instant condemnation is fixed upon the creature on whom the demand is made. That is the special mark of what we may now call the Sinaitic ministry—that worn-out system which is now passed away, in God's grace. The consequence of that ministry was bondage and not liberty; hence you see the apostle, in contrasting it here in this chapter, says, "The Lord is that spirit." It should be a small *s*; it is not the Holy Ghost: what he means to say is that the Lord is the spirit of all that is in the Old Testament. You will find certain things represented in the former thing, in the way of types, and so on; but the *spirit* of it all was the Lord Himself. Then you have the Holy Ghost in the next clause, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." This marks the new position in connection with this new ministry. The Holy Ghost is there; but if the Holy Ghost be there, then there must have been previously a ministration of the very

thing that was formerly demanded, namely, righteousness ; because it is the ministry of righteousness, and glory, and the Spirit, in contrast with the ministry of bondage, death, and condemnation.

Well, now, that is simple enough, at least as to the doctrinal part of it. The previous order of things, and, I may say, that which people want to revive in a mongrel way now, consisted in God making demands upon man in the flesh ; and, if God do so, man must necessarily come into the condemnation which inevitably flows from it, for he has no righteousness for God ; he is in unrighteousness. But now what comes out is this : that God, from the glory, from the very place where that blessed One is at the right hand of God, *ministers to* a creature upon this earth a righteousness that he had previously *demand*ed from him. He *ministers it to him*, instead of looking that man should be up to the glory of God, from which he had fallen so far short. It is a ministry of glory, and of righteousness, and of the Spirit ; that is, the Holy Ghost is the charac-

teristic power of everything which is based upon this righteousness—the pedestal upon which it all stands.

But there is something more, an exceedingly blessed and important element, in this second ministry, far beyond even what I have spoken of as to righteousness and the Spirit. It is its formative power; the effect of being under the ministry of glory is to be transformed into the likeness of the blessed One in whose face the glory shines. The law never did that. The law never made a man like itself, but condemned him for his *unlikeness*. It cursed him on account of his shortcomings; and let me say, that if it did not do that, it would cease to be the law. You will thus see the folly of taking away the penalties of the law. What good would it be if they were taken away? If you take away the penalties of the law you destroy the whole power of it. The law, without its necessary penalties, is a miserable thing, good for nothing. The principal constituent element of law, its characteristic, its very

nature, was this, that it condemned man for being short of its requirements. Man was short of the chief requirements of the law of God, and it condemned him necessarily because of it.

What is it that suits a poor wretched creature now, in the full consciousness of his shortness, and inability, and feebleness? Just this, that the very thing that he had not for God, God has for him! Man had no righteousness; God gives him righteousness. He was under bondage; God gives him liberty. He could not stand in the presence of the glory; God ministers glory to him. And the necessary consequence of that is, the *formative* power of which I was speaking.

I ask you affectionately, are you in the *liberty* of that ministry? Do you know, in your soul and in your conscience, the liberty that comes from being under that ministry? That you have got a righteousness which is suited to the presence of God, and that the glory from whence that righteousness is ministered to you, and the One in whose face the whole glory of God shines,

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is just the One who suits you ; and besides that, as you look at that blessed One in all the glory of God where He is, do you know the transforming power and effect of that vision, producing in its feeble measure (because of the vessel upon which it acts) something of the likeness of Christ, “changed into the same image from glory to glory” ?

You see, it is a wonderful thing to think of, what the purpose of God is about it ; and this is where the deficiency is in every one of our souls. The thought of God is to have a people on this earth walking in the steps of His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the heavens. That is His thought, His present thought about His people ; and if you and I have not in our souls the sense of that, that God is seeking to have a people upon this earth, in their feeble measure the reflection of His own Son in the heavens, how can we have that communion with God which apprehends His things ? If the thought of God be to have a heavenly people upon this earth, in the

life of His Son, you cannot go on with this world; and if this be *not* God's thought, what is? If God be seeking to have a heavenly people, a people in their practices, and ways, and walk, and character, and relationships, heavenly, if that *be* His thought, then we cannot possibly go on with the world. I do violence at once to the purpose of God if I do.

If we mean to go on with the world, I think it would be far more honest if we said, "No, God has *not* such a thought in His mind at all. His purpose is to have a people here to enjoy the world as much as they can; that is His purpose." I think it is a great deal better that we should be honest with our hearts and consciences. There is nothing God hates and detests so much as unreality. The great thing that He is looking for in His people is *reality*, and not to be trifling with conscience about these things. Better for you to give a denial to the fact, and say, "God has no such purpose; Christ did *not* go up to heaven to form a people like Himself, and the

Holy Ghost did *not* come down to keep a people like Christ." It is better to say so at once, and then go hard and fast with the world. There is nothing so miserable and detestable as a sort of truckling with this wretched, polluted world, taking just as much of Christianity as you think will suit you. This is exactly what people are doing. They take just as much of the truth of God as they think will put some sort of status upon them; but the part that cuts them, that strips them of the thing their heart clings to, they turn it aside. It reminds me of what used to be done in days gone by, and is even now very common: people take and read the word of God—the Old Testament; they find most wonderful promises and blessings, and wonderful prospects for the Jew, and they take them to themselves with the most perfect self-complacency; but what is done with the curses? They quietly leave those. This is exactly what people are doing with their consciences with reference to the truth. They take as much of the truth of God as suits

them (what a terrible snare it is !), just as much as will make their consciences easy to go on with the devil and the world ; but the part that cuts them asunder, that exposes them for their worldliness, that brings them in as short of this wonderful testimony, and shows them up with the light of God streaming upon them in all its brightness and glory—they turn aside from that. Believe me, you must either take Christianity or leave it. You cannot mix Christianity and earthly religion. This is what people are trying to do, but it is the destruction of the testimony of the people of God in these last times where it is the case. They are semi-Christians and semi-Jews. They find that God gave certain things to a people on this earth, and they take them for themselves, thus setting aside the heavenly character of the testimony committed to them.

But when I open such a Scripture as this, for instance, a Scripture that shows me the beloved Son cast out of this earth, rejected, refused, and despised, spit upon by the world and the people

of the world, and the glory of God put in the face of that blessed One up there whom man despised, I have no question whatever about the character of the ministry, and about the character of the glory. The very rejection of Christ upon the earth, and the very glory of Christ in the heavens, opens my heart to all the liberty that is up there, but equally shuts me up to the narrowness of His path down here. You cannot help it. And therefore I feel it is really of moment to bring people at issue with their consciences about it; and I do feel it is a solemn thing to stand here and say it; I feel, before God, it is a very responsible thing, to speak any word for God in such a moment as this; but there is nothing that is working more mischief and more harm at the present time amongst the people of God than that sort of half-and-half bowing to the truth. There is a want of straightforward, open facing of the question with conscience, a turning aside of the edge and power of the word of God from the soul. And not only so, but some are positively

seeking by the Scriptures to vindicate this degradation of the truth of God. I say it is a very solemn thing, and one which everyone of us ought to seriously lay to heart. Do we really mean to be governed in our ways by the thoughts of God? May He give you and me a firmer grasp in our conscience as to what the character of the thing is that He has introduced from heaven, in connection with the glorified Man up there! His purpose is to find down here on this earth a people in some little measure after the fashion of that blessed One who is in glory. That is His purpose and thought.

And therefore you get that verse of the third chapter, which comes in in connection with this: "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord;" not like Moses, who had his face covered that the children of Israel could not look upon it. You remember the circumstance which the Holy Ghost refers to. Moses went up to the mount to receive the tables of testimony, and when he came down the second

time, his face shone; and the shining of Moses' face, as he came down, was the reflection of the condemning power of that law which man could not stand, and therefore he covered his face, not when he went into God, but when he came out to man. Man could not look at him, because every ray that shone from that face made a demand upon man which he could not meet. But here is a more brilliant glory: a glory that shines, not from the face of a poor weak man like Moses, but the whole glory of God itself, the unsullied radiancy of His glory, the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of His own Son. Is not that a wonderful thing, that you are positively capable of looking at the radiancy of the glory of God as it streams from that blessed face? Capable of gazing at it! Why? Because I have got righteousness under my feet instead of condemnation, and the Holy Ghost in me instead of my being in bondage; and every ray of glory that shines from that blessed face in the heavens is the reflection to my soul of

the completeness, and sufficiency, and fulness of His finished work—the eternal pedestal of blessedness He has set me upon.

But there is more than this. As I look at that glory it has a *formative* power in me. I tell you, beloved brethren, and I say it to myself, as well as you, what we all stand in need of (I speak especially to those who have a genuine desire in their souls to be a little more after the power of this ministry) is, to be long enough in the presence of that blessed Christ who is glorified to catch the features of that Christ, and so have Him engraven upon the “fleshy tables of our hearts.” That is what is wanted. It is not an *effort*. You might try to be like Christ in glory until you were worn out with trying, and you would not catch one feature of His. The very fact of your striving proves your inability. But what is it? It is a thing that nobody can explain. I do not believe you can ever convey to another what it is to sit engrossed with that blessed One who is there in glory. Who could ex-

plain it ? It is a thing that a person may speak of out of the fulness of his own heart ; but who could convey either the satisfaction of it, or the effect of it upon oneself, individually ? The word of God speaks to me of the fact, but there is no man living, nor has there been one, who could convey to another, be he ever so intelligent, or spiritual, or earnest, the sense which his heart gets while he sits as clay in the hands of that glorious potter. It is impossible to describe it, and yet it is a *reality*. It is a reality, that the person who sits in the company and presence of the glorified Christ, insensibly to himself, contracts moral likeness to Him.

When Moses came down from the mount, though it was the mount of condemnation, there was a glory streaming from his face which no one could look at ; but there was only one man in the whole of that company who was insensible to the fact that there was glory in his face, and that was himself. Where did he get that glory ? He went up and he was alone with God in the

mount, and the glory, though it was connected with the ministry of condemnation, was reflected upon his face when he went down. You and I, with unveiled face, no veil either on us, or on that blessed One up there (for I think the passage will bear the thought of that,) there is neither the veil upon Christ nor upon us, everything is open, unveiled; and, as we by faith look at that blessed One, as we sit before Him, as we are sufficiently passive in His presence, He is engraved on our hearts by the Spirit, and when we come down there is the reflection upon us.

You know perfectly well what it is to meet a person who gives your heart the sense that he has been with Christ, who reminds you of Christ. But how seldom is it the case! What I feel so deplorable, and what one mourns over, is that, even with reference to the very best of things, we leave so much the impress of *ourselves* upon them, instead of Christ. That is what is so sad. In what is done for Christ, we are more impressed with the one who is doing it than the One for

whom it is done. What one longs for, what one's heart yearns after, is to be just like clay in the hands of the potter, as our hymn expresses it:

“Thou art the potter, we the clay.”

God's thought is that we should be as clay, *absolutely passive*, so that the potter might leave the mark of His own beautiful hands upon us. What a wonderful thing it would be if that were the case with us, as we move through these scenes of sorrow, and difficulty, and trial, and temptation, and besetment, surrounded by all that is in this poor, wretched, miserable world, which the devil will head up with his masterpiece of iniquity against Christ; if we were distinguished, not so much by what we say and do, as by the way that hand governs us, controls us, guides us—the hand of the potter. That is the meaning of this last verse of the third of Corinthians. As I said before, it is not *effort*, it is not grasping after something, it is not seeking to possess yourselves of anything, it is simply this—“We all, with

unveiled face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image." That is the clay entirely under the hand of the blessed potter.

It is a wonderful thing that God should take such a thing as clay to reflect His glory in. I will speak of that more fully presently; but what I want to press now is that there is this *formative* power in this ministry. Instead of demanding or seeking for anything from us, it brings *to* us from the heavens the thing we could not give, and besides that, it transforms us into the image and likeness of Christ, as we are sufficiently like clay in His hands.

Now, may I ask you affectionately—and I do not want to make anybody depressed or morbid—but I ask you, how much of your time do you really sit down in the Lord's presence? How much time and leisure have you, not merely from the business of this world, but even supposing your service is for the Lord, how much time have you for this that I am speaking of?

Do you not know that in order that there may be great outgoings, there must be great incomings? There will be no outshining, if there is not in-shining. What is it then? Simply this, that my heart and soul have leisure enough, both from the things without and within, to sit down in the solitude of the presence of that blessed, holy, glorious Person who is in heaven, finding my delight in Him for His own sake. Now what do you and I know about that? What do we know positively, in our own souls, of that blessed, wonderful retirement, sitting in the company of Christ, blind to all else save His beauty and His glory, deaf to every other sound but that of His voice?

“ Oh for a heart submissive, meek,
 My great Redeemer's throne,
 Where only Christ is heard to speak,
 Where Jesus reigns alone.”

Would not a person fresh from a scene like that be *redolent* of Christ?

Some one once said to me, speaking of another,

“I like to be in the company of So-and so.” I replied, “Why?” The answer was, “Because he always reminds me of a third person.” “Who is that?” “The blessed One in glory.” Oh, what a blessed thing it is to walk through this world, and as we meet each other, in our business, our households, or domestic relationships, to remind each other of that One in glory, to have the fulness of that Christ in measure reproduced in poor, wretched creatures like you and me! It is a most blessed thing—the most marvellous ministry that could be conceived.

Well, now, if we come to the fourth chapter, there are only three things I will speak of in connection with this ministry. They are in the seventh verse. He says, “we have this treasure,” and it is “in earthen vessels,” and there is what is called “the excellency of the power,” or, as I believe it should be, “the *surpassingness* of the power.” These are three wonderful things to get before our thoughts.

“This treasure,” what is it? I do not think

the treasure is so much the estimate that my heart forms of Christ, as the value that God has found in Him. That is the reason, I believe, why it is called a "*treasure*." I do not deny the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is to be a treasure to His people, because you get the Scripture elsewhere: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also;" but here the treasure, which is, of course, Christ, is presented more as it is looked at from God's side. It is the treasure in God's estimation. It is what the thought of God is as to this blessed One. Christ is *His* treasure. How did that treasure come into the vessel? Look at the sixth verse for a moment. He says: "For God, who commanded that out of darkness light should shine, hath shined in our hearts, for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." That is the way the treasure comes in. It is not that *I* have possessed myself of the treasure. It is a wonderful thing—it sustains one's heart—to think of the sovereignty of the grace of God;

to think of that sovereign grace in its actings, as well as its purposes. How, then, did this treasure find its way into our hearts? Let me ask, how did light come into this dark world? Remember this, the sun was not the creature of the first day; it was created afterwards. How then did light come? What was the light of the first three days in the old creation? This: "God said, Let there be light; and light was." Just so spiritually in our hearts: God, in His wonderful, blessed, sovereign way of dealing, God Himself, who commanded that out of darkness light should shine, is the God who has shone in our hearts. It is not merely a ray from Him, or some emanation from Him, but God Himself shining; that is a very different thing; God Himself shining in a man's heart, in all His blessed illuminating power, for, or in order to, "the shining forth of the radiancy of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Take an instance of it. This very Saul of Tarsus himself, on the road to Damascus, a perse-

cutor, who had never had a good thought of Christ, nothing but hatred, a man who thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, suddenly, in a moment, without the slightest warning, saw “a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun,” a light that put out the sun, shining in his noonday splendour, and a Saviour in glory was revealed in his soul. He is thus the living instance of the way this blessed treasure is deposited in a man’s soul. Paul himself, who was writing this, is the living instance of the way in which God would command the light to shine out of darkness in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The whole glory of God is thus expressed.

And you cannot understand one single thing about the glory of God, except as you understand how it is seen in the face of Jesus Christ, and it is in the presence of that glory that my conscience is dealt with; and if you think you can learn God in any other way, you are seriously mistaken,

because the moment you bring your understanding or your mind to bear upon the things of God, apart from your conscience, there is the greatest danger of shipwreck as to faith. If I really see the whole glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ, I cannot help being challenged in the depths of my conscience, and that is the blessedness of it. There are royal roads to learning in other things, but not in this. The moment you have to do with God and Christ, you are convicted, and the earliest expression of your heart in the presence of that glory must be, "I abhor myself." And yet, as I said, this leads to confidence, and is the only thing that is *formative* in our hearts.

That is the first thing. Next observe where this treasure is placed; that is the second point in the verse: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." You may have often observed that when man has anything valuable, he generally encases it in something that is far more valuable. The outside coverings of man's valuable things

are generally a great deal more brilliant and valuable than the thing that is inside. The casket eclipses the jewel. Not so with God. He takes His treasure, the costliest thing, the most valuable and precious to Him, and puts it in the most contemptible vessel that you could conceive, that is, a poor, fragile vessel of clay. This is what he calls an earthen vessel; a poor, perishing, fragile vessel of clay.

But then He has a purpose in this; it gives Him the opportunity of doing two things. First His delight is to *make everything of the treasure*, and second, He is pleased to bring out the surpassingness of the *power*. There is not only the surpassing glory of the treasure, but the surpassing power with which He works in the vessel—the vessel broken to atoms; indeed, not worth anything until it is broken to pieces; but behind this poor vessel there is surpassing power. This, indeed, is a wonderful sight to look at. The whole power of God goes along with the poor vessel, into which He puts this treasure. “We

have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassingness of the power should be of God and not of us." But we have not only to accept the breakings that God brings upon us; but beside that, and in addition to that, we must keep the sentence of the cross, the death of Christ, which has given us liberty from the condemnation to which we were exposed—we must keep that death upon ourselves. God breaks the vessel; but we must keep the sentence of death upon it as well, in order "that the surpassingness of the power may be of God and not of us."

I do not pursue this further, but would ask you to think of these three things which are connected with this ministry: first, the vessel of clay, just what you and I are; secondly, a treasure placed in it of surpassing glory; and thirdly, a power that is surpassing in its efficiency *behind* it; and that power ever working in company with nothingness and weakness and self-abnegation, as well as a complete, utter, thorough denial of the flesh and the world. You cannot have

power otherwise; and there is no manifestation of Christ, no shining forth of Christ, except as this vessel is entirely as clay in the hands of the potter. There is no shining in, or shining out either. It must be clay for Christ, the treasure, to shine into, and clay for the Holy Ghost to bring the features of Christ out of, so that others may see them.

The picture alluded to here is no doubt Gideon's army. They put the light into the pitcher, but the light never shone out until the pitcher was broken. They had to break the pitchers, and then the light shone. And no doubt the Spirit of God alludes to that fact here. You have the shining in of the glory, and you have the surpassing power working that it may shine out. These two things go together, namely, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ shining into our poor earthen vessels, or pitchers, and the surpassing power of God that works through these vessels for the display of the brilliancy of Christ.

How little our hearts are really up to God's

wonderful purpose in giving such a ministry as this from those opened heavens ! How little of affection there is in our hearts to enter into the purpose of God and into His thought, that, in a world which rejected His Son, cast Him out, despised Him, nailed Him to the cross, there should be those who should be the expression, the manifestation of that blessed, wonderful One whom the world rejected, but whom God glorified. Do your hearts desire that ? Is that what you long for ? Is that your purpose and object ? Is that what you propose to yourself ? God will help you if you have such purpose of heart. Can you say to Him, I have only one desire, that I should be upon this earth a vessel in whom the display of the glory of Thy Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, should be found in every circumstance here ? God delights to help us, and you will have the comfort, the sustainment, of being in communion with His thought. I do not know any greater comfort in the whole word of God. Oh, the blessedness and rest of having, through grace, common mind

with the Lord in any little measure! God and His people of one mind about those things that relate to the glory of His Son. It is most wonderful grace on His part to bring us into such a place that we can have like mind with Him, and to enable us by such *surpassing* power.

Suppose I see one turning his back upon everything in this world, who looks for nothing in it, who has no interests here, who does not expect anything, and would not take anything from the world. I say, What surpassing power is displayed in that man! If I see a poor, feeble creature lying on a bed of sickness, racked with pain, the poor body pressed down with disease, morn, noon, and night, and one who might be tempted to say, What good am I, a trial to everyone about me, and a burden to myself?—yet if I see, amid all the weariness and pain, instead of complaint, satisfaction, instead of querulousness, rest and quietness, instead of quickness of temper, the blessed manifestation of Christ in meekness and endurance, I say, What a surpassing power there is there!

That is what this ministry is able to do, beloved friends, and that is God's thought about us in relation to it. There is not a circumstance in life, or a detail in our history, or a position that we can be called into, whether sickness or health, pain or its absence, prosperity or loss, trial or ease, there is not a single thing too many for the one who is satisfied to be clay in the hands of surpassing power. And more than that, it is in these very circumstances that Christ is endeared to us, for He alone is our sufficiency for all. Also, it is *where we are*, not where we would be, that the blessed God desires to have His Son seen in us.

This is the testimony that is really lacking at this moment. Every one has heard us speak of *doctrines*, and we are supposed to be clear about them, but people are amazed to see so little of the doctrines practised, because they fail to see anything correspondingly in us. Oh, for the manifestation of the truth, that exhibition of Christ which would stop the mouth of the rejecter, and

commend itself to the consciences of men ! And hence, says the Holy Ghost, “ by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God ” (ver. 2). Men would be forced to say, Though I hate those people because they are so narrow, yet at the same time my conscience is bound to give this testimony, that they seek to please God. Herein is the efficiency of the power manifested, that in every circumstance, every service, everything I have to do, I am to be an expression of the skill of the hand that is handling me.

The Lord, by His Spirit, give our hearts to desire to be His handywork, to say in reality, and to act it as well, Lord Jesus, take me, and form me after the fashion of Thine own heart, place me where Thou wilt, only grant me this desire, that Thou mayest be magnified in my body, whether I live or die ! Oh, may our hearts prize more than ever this blessed ministry, characterized as it is by such glories as we have had before us !

THE ARTIFICIAL AND THE SPIRITUAL.

(2 Cor. iii. 18.)

It is very clear and distinct, feeble though the measure be in which the soul apprehends it, that it is only as we are occupied with Christ where He is, that we are like Him in our ways. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

But, I may ask, have we grasped in soul, or rather, have we been possessed by, all that is implied in these wondrous words? Do we not often detect in ourselves a lack of that spring and

power of life which imparts quietness and ease and restfulness of heart? And in the absence of these, yet knowing they ought to be there, are not many forced into what I must call an artificial state of soul, which carries on its very bearing the opposite of life and the Spirit?

There is something refreshing and beautiful in the spring and freshness of life, and it matters not how diligently or carefully formed anything *resembling* life may be, the difference between what is artificial and what is real is at once apparent.

Light and heat are neither of them, nor both together, the tree, most necessary though they be as the soil and atmosphere, as it were, in which it is planted. A Christian is, as such, in the light, and he is moreover the object of the Father's love, even in the measure of it in which Jesus was loved—"hast loved them *as thou* hast loved me" (John xvii. 23).

Now, is there not a great difference between a soul held and governed in divine power and

reality by these things, and one who, because painfully sensible of the mere outside owning of them, is seeking to hold them? It is just the difference between my heart keeping the peace of God, and the peace of God keeping, as in a garrison, my heart. But there is more than this difference, for there is the practical effect. If the soul be not held, but seeking to hold, there is ever prominent in its state, the unrest that invariably accompanies *effort*: disquiet and fear about almost everything, as well as uncertainty even where most was expected from God. The contrary to all this is Christianity. Unseen realities are the governing power acting on the soul, absorbing and commanding it, the affections of the man *formed, sustained, and satisfied* by Christ, their only object; and, as a consequence, rest, quietness, and ease in the most untoward circumstances, walking in that path which "the vulture's eye hath not seen."

There ought not to be anything forced about us as Christians; effort of any kind betrays the

absence of power. The presence of Christ not only imparts to us, but secures through us, all that is suitable to His presence; effort tells the tale of our being out of His presence, and is invariably resorted to for the purpose of acquiring that which is the simple result of being in His presence, and of being acted upon by Himself. I do not for a moment wish to excuse anything like sloth, or ease, or self-indulgence of any kind, in anything, much less so in these things which have to do with man in the Spirit and not in the flesh: but I do feel it is a great and solemn reality to press upon the people of God that the presence of Christ can alone command the heart. What a blessed thing for a poor worm to be held by the presence of the Lord of glory! Oh, I cannot but speak of it! such glories as are indeed to be found here: to be the subject on which His presence acts, instead of our poor hearts and thoughts acting on Him; to be the subject of light and heat, such light and love, too!

What was it formed John? Was it not that

he leaned on the bosom of Jesus? John lay there because he knew it pleased his Lord and Master; and may we not do the same? How much effort was there about John when he lay there? Did he find it difficult to say, "Lord, who is it?" Peter may have felt it difficult, and was glad to use John's nearness; but as to John, the question came forth as the simple and natural result of being where he was. That bosom was everything to John: he was not thinking of *being there*, or of the *results* to him of being there; he was there for its own sake; hence he was not restless or unnatural. That blessed Person on whose bosom he reclined was to John "all." Oh, to have the sceptre of Christ swaying its dominion of life and liberty from pole to pole in our poor hearts! Our looks would then tell of Him, our words speak of Him, our thoughts rise and set in Him, and all so easily and naturally, that is, in spiritual power; in a word, Christ would be our life practically, as He is our life truly and really; the glory of the Lord would thus transform us into

the same image from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The Lord alone knows what searchings of heart this leads to. The heart that has passed through it alone knows what it is to rise and walk apart from all that once governed and influenced it, often, too, beyond what we suspected even; but so it is. Yet Christ is worthy. May we know what it is to be in some more full measure the subjects of His power and presence before Himself, formed by Him alone, long enough in the mount, as it were, to catch the pattern of the glory, not because of the good of it, nor even in the first instance that we may be a testimony to others, or enrich ourselves, but because of what He is in His own intrinsic blessedness and preciousness.

It is a great cheer to the soul to know that the whole power of God, by the Spirit, is for us in the maintenance of this blessed walk on earth; only as Christ alone fills our eyes and hearts are we enriched ourselves, or any testimony to others;

thus it is we are at rest, having reached the haven of quiet. Another has blessedly said, "Heaven is the metropolis of Christianity;" may we know it is so in deep blessedness. If a Jerusalem or Rome were enough to divert for a moment such an one as Paul, surely much less prevails with us who have so little of that divine energy and power which characterized him in so remarkable a degree.

May He by His own Spirit so attract, win, and satisfy the hearts of His beloved people, presenting to them Him who alone can secure this in them, that they, finding their all in Christ, may be like "a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit."

JOHN'S DYING NOTE.

(John iii. 25—36.)

THE true test of every one and every thing is Christ. It was so when He lived and walked on the earth ; it is so now, though the world seeth Him no more.

It is wonderful how latent principles and concealed thoughts are all elicited, and brought to the surface, before this test. Every man on earth is posted in his true place morally, when tested by Christ, and the importance or the contrary of everything is detected when its relation to Christ is found out. This world, with its motives and principles, its greatness and its littleness, is eminently favourable to questions. Many and varied have

been the topics which, from time to time, men have suggested and debated; the din and strife of party clamour has again and again been heard, and when the fury of the fight has subsided, and the battle is over, the question which raised it is still without solution, and is left unanswered.

The present age delights in questions, reasonings, and uncertainties on all subjects, but specially in the region where revelation claims exclusively to be heard. The delight and highest pleasure of philosophy and science, at the present moment, is to tear to fragments every little shred of faith or confidence in God's testimony which has escaped the malignity of Satan's rage against God and His Christ. In truth, man is never so little as in his greatness, and never appears so insignificant or dwarfish as in his puny efforts against Christ. Then it is most of all that man himself, with his own lips, proclaims his folly; then is it that God makes foolish the wisdom of this world. "Where is the wise, where is the scribe, where is the disputer of this world: "

The truth is, the great answer to every question is, "Christ" — "Christ the wisdom of God and the power of God;" and the heart that knows His Person, and loves His voice, delights to bear its record to what a final, conclusive, satisfactory answer He, and He alone, is. Christ is God's resource in every crisis, and God's reply to every question. There have been times in the history of God's testimony and people on earth when human ingenuity and ken might do their utmost, to issue only in despair; then it is that God displays the fulness of His resource; with Him the demand is no measure of the supply. In human circumstances, as a rule, the result of a crisis is a panic; but with God difficulties are delighted in, to shew how entirely He is above them.

Now it is this which marks what I designedly call "John's dying note." He had spoken much and often ere this; he had testified, too, in earnest and to purpose; there were around him those who loved and valued him; and in this sense the greatest of women born was not alone.

Questions between John's followers and the Jews were raised by the latter; and an attempt to make John and Christ the leaders of opposite factions and parties was an occasion for John to shew where his heart was, and how entirely Christ had settled all questions for him. Observe how blessedly he hides himself behind the Christ of God, and how he makes little of himself in order to make much of Jesus. What was John but a poor creature of the earth? His words, too, what were they but the language of one who was "of the earth earthy?" It was to the bridegroom the bride belonged, but the friend of the bridegroom, who stood and heard Him, as John did Christ, rejoiced greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. How blessed to see a man himself so captivated by Christ, bound with chains of love—embracing as it were his conqueror's feet—that he is ready to break every vessel, and himself first of all among them, if he may but set forth His excellency and His glory, who coming from above, is above all!

But he will not even rest here: he will go

beyond his own thoughts of who and what this blessed One is, and hence the Father's thoughts about His Son must form "John's dying note:" he will sing, even on earth, a nobler, sweeter strain; and how simple, yet impressive it is, as the revelation of God in his heart, giving him heaven-born thoughts concerning the beloved Son—"The Father loveth the Son" "He giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him" "He hath given all things into His hand." It is all Christ from first to last; man, Israel, bride, John, are all eclipsed and distanced; the tiny stars all diminish, yea, retire, before the rising Sun, and we are left to sit down and rest our weary hearts beneath His rays, and find our satisfaction in the fact of Jesus being all!

"Hark, the thrilling symphonies,
Seem within to seize us;
Add we to their holy lays,
Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!
Sweetest name on mortal tongue,
Sweetest note in angels' song,
Sweetest anthem ever known,
Jesus, Jesus reigns alone!"

CHRIST, THE OBJECT OF AFFECTION AND SYMPATHY.

(John xx ; Mark xiv.)

“WHAT wonderful times are ours !” are words on almost every lip at present. Showers of blessing, as they say, are falling on every side. Some have gone so far as to state that, like history, Pentecost is being repeated; as if the blessed Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, had left the earth since then; and that prayer, earnest prayer, had brought Him back. Truly these days of ours are strange and solemn. No doubt there is an energy of the Holy Ghost

abroad in the land both in the spread of testimony, and in the awakening of souls. It is well to bear in mind that God is sovereign while we are to be subject, and that in the exercise of His sovereignty He may, and does use any instrument that He pleases: and the more His people are walking with Him, the more subject they will be on the one hand, and the readier to rejoice in all that He does on the other. But what about the Lord Jesus Christ in these times? I would seriously and solemnly ask if it be true that this spring tide of blessing, which, it is said, is carrying on its waves thousands of souls, is bearing them to His feet, there to worship and adore? Is it awakening in their hearts new affections which find their goal in Himself? Is it bearing them on high, so as to lead them to count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord? The enquiry is of the deepest moment to us all. God forbid that any of His people should undervalue or under-estimate any service rendered to fallen man. But is Christ

dearer to us than every one beside? And is it a small matter to us if His desires and claims seem disregarded or forgotten? It is because such thoughts are awakened and kept alive by the aspect of professing Christianity, that I propose taking a glance at the two Scriptures which stand at the head of this paper.

The touching story of Mary in John xx. is familiar to almost every one. It is a striking instance of ignorant, yet genuine affection. She might have known His glorious resurrection. She ought to have remembered His words,—“After three days I will rise again.” But though her faith and intelligence were defective, her heart beat true to its object and her treasure. Contrast her with Peter and John, and does she not stand on a platform far above them? They can return to their home, satisfied that Jesus’ body was not in the tomb, though they knew not where He was. This was not enough for Mary; her loyal heart pants to know where He is, and finding Him not, is ready to break with grief.

She stands without at the sepulchre weeping, stooping to gaze at the spot where they laid Him. Unperturbed by the angels, disconcerted in no wise, there she lingers, and there her heart must be—beautiful instance of genuine though ignorant affection, and the amazing power of one object when the affections are governed thereby. “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.....Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take Him away.”

How was she rewarded? Most surely according to the desires of her heart towards Himself. First, He allows her to hear her own name on His risen lips. Wonderful moment for Mary! Wonderful moment for Jesus! Was not every pulsation of her devoted heart met, and more than satisfied, when His blessed voice caused her to look into His own face, her Master and her Lord? I am bold to say that two hearts were made glad that daybreak,—hers who could find no home where He was not, and His who gave His life for

worthless rebels like us. And I am bold to say further, that it gave Him greater joy to own her as His sheep, calling her by name, Mary ! than it did her to be so owned and called. But this was not all, for He commissions her now to carry the most wonderful message ever entrusted to human lips, (see verse 17)—“Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father ; and to my God, and your God.” He sends her forth to proclaim the victory of His love, not only that He had triumphed so gloriously, that every enemy was under His feet, but that He, the risen man, was Head of a new race, that, “both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one : for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Thy name unto my brethren.” (Heb. ii. 11, 12.) He sends her forth out of the second garden, where the mournful history of the first garden (Eden) had been more than wiped out by the glories of His triumph, to say to poor trembling hearts like ours, that He Himself had not only

won a new place for them, but that He had positively brought them into it in Himself: "He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one," which does not mean that He was degraded to their level, but that He, by His death, His glorious triumph and victory, had elevated them to the heights of His own new place before His Father and God.

What grace! wondrous grace! He passes by angels that excel in strength, and comes down to a poor weak woman upon the earth, owns her as His sheep, and then sends her forth to wipe the tearful eyes, and comfort the trembling hearts of His own, by announcing unto them the conquests of His love. Who can say now that Jesus does not delight to reward the devoted heart? And who can deny that in thus rewarding it, He gratifies His own changeless affections?

Let us now turn to Mark xiv. It is the only instance recorded in Scripture of any one having intelligent sympathy with Christ: it is a wonderful scene; every one is thinking of death. Jesus

has the vision of death before His spirit. How must the passover, with its lamb whose blood was shed, have brought forward death, before every mind? There were the type and the antitype face to face as it were—the chief priests and scribes, with a hatred to Christ which nothing but His death could appease, seeking how they might take Him by craft, and put Him to death. Thus we see how death filled all thoughts; but there was present one, a poor weak woman, too, whose heart kept company with all that was passing through His; she alone was in full sympathy with His feelings at the moment, and entered into the thoughts of God concerning the beloved Son.

It has been remarked that the account with which Mark furnishes us of the close of His blessed mission of love, presents Jesus more solitary in it than any other; incidents and circumstances which are recorded more or less in all the other gospels, are absent from Mark. If this be so, how strikingly significant is the record of this act

of Mary's in the house of Simon the leper! Her heart and her affections, in true and genuine sympathy, traversing with Him the dreariness and loneliness of His path, as well as marking her sense of the utter worthlessness of all around in view of His agony and death; on one side intelligently apprehending not only who and what He was in Himself, but likewise His value in the eyes of His Father; on the other, making use of His tomb as a burying place for every valuable thing of hers on earth. For her, if Jesus dies, He carries all of hers down into the grave with Himself!

In Matthew and Mark, the blessed Lord is consciously in man's hand, in the closing hours of His life. This indeed characterizes these gospels in their record of His death, His cross; which was both the fruit of the counsel of God in view of redemption, as well as the fruit of Jewish enmity, and man's revolted, reprobate, heart. How blessed it is then to see Mary here at such a moment, marking her sense of the glories of His

person in the face of the accumulated hatred of both devil and man ! It is a blessed sight, in the intelligent apprehension of faith, the homage of one willing, loving heart, thus laid at His feet—one solitary soul in that rebellious land owning Him Lord of all. All this sheds its light on His own words—“ Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.”

Let us now look at the facts, as they are here recorded, a little more in detail. Mary's affection, her intelligent sympathy, takes the precedence of the treachery of Judas. Her love to Jesus was of that order and character, that it secured for Him that which was suitable to Himself at such a moment, and that which entirely met His heart and thoughts. “ The box of ointment of spikenard very precious,” answered to all that was around Jesus, in the hatred and malignity of man, in that hour ; but it also coincided with all that filled His soul ; and it was, as

well, community of thought with the Father concerning the Son of His bosom. It is a sight of surpassing blessedness to gaze at Him as He sits there; to see Him accepting, and vindicating, too, the affection and sympathy which His own Person had created and called forth; to see her, too, fruit as she was of His grace, expending on Him to whom she showed her all—that all, as another has touchingly and blessedly expressed it. Mary, as it were, says by this action of hers, “While the King sitteth at His table, my spike-nard sendeth forth the smell thereof.”

There is another point of solemn interest in this affecting scene, namely, how opposite the thoughts of men are to what suits the mind of God and His Christ; the most that some could say concerning Mary’s act was, that it was marked by waste. Oh, how little was He in their eyes, who measured the service rendered to Him after this fashion! For it is the person to whom the service is rendered, that is the true measure of its value. Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father; Jesus, the

spotless and perfect Son of God; Jesus, the willing and ready friend of need, and want and sorrow, stood so low in their estimate, as to call forth the expression of waste in regard to that which was voluntarily expended upon Him. It is the same to-day; the present is but the offspring of the past; the family character is not wanting in either; the heir-loom of indifference to God's Christ, and no sense of who He is or what He is, passes on from generation to generation; and to-day, with all its boasted light, superiority and advance, the poor, the perishing, the destitute, and the oppressed, have their friends and allies, but Jesus, the precious, blessed, wondrous Saviour, is forgotten and neglected—only remembered to be slighted and despised.

There is a bright spot in this dark cloud; turn your eye upon it for a moment: Jesus vindicates her. How blessed! The eye under which this act was performed discerned its value, and the heart that had caused to spring up affections so suited to Himself her Lord, measures out

its appreciation of all that was expended on Himself; and He lets every one know what He felt and thought of this manifestation of His devotedness to His Person. "Let her alone, she hath wrought a good work on Me; she hath done what she could; she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily, I say unto you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done, shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." Oh, the joy of being vindicated by Jesus, and the satisfaction of knowing that, however feebly, we have truly ministered to the longings of His heart?

The Lord give His saints in these last days more genuine affection for, and true sympathy with, our Lord Jesus Christ, and His interests, that nothing may be able to divert their hearts from Him, engage their powers but Him, satisfy their souls but Him!