

“The Master’s Yoke.”



No. 27.

“Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well;
for so I am.”

John, xiii., 13.

“It is enough for the disciple that he be as his
Master, and the servant as his Lord.”

Matt. x., 25.

The Master's Yoke.

No. 27.

FEEDING ON LILIES.

There are three references in the Song of Solomon to lilies which seem to be of one character : they are ii., 16, and vi., 3, where they are the food of the Beloved (or N.T. of His flock) and iv., 5, where they are mentioned in connection with the bride.

One of the earliest questions in the book is where the Shepherd's flock is pastured ; the directions to this place have been given clearly, now we have the food. It is food for the affections for we learn from the third passage mentioned that the affections of the bride are perfectly developed to His satisfaction on this same food. We may surely desire to know more of this, for it is our endeavour to be such that our Lord may take pleasure in us, that our love for Him may grow continually in response to His great love for us—a love that could not be quenched by the many waters through which He passed.

It is interesting therefore to look at Psalms xlv., lxix, and lxxx, for they are, by their title, connected with these same lilies. There is undoubtedly much truth that can be developed from these psalms, but what is particularly in mind at the moment relates to the desire of the first chapter of the song to be associated more closely with Him whom our souls love rather than with His companions.

Very blessed it is to have Psalm xlv before us in this connection. Here is the assurance of His final purpose, the confidence that we have been desired, and that we shall shine in His glory in close and happy association with Himself. When all around has been brought into subjection by His power and might, then in the intimacy of His presence there is gladness and rejoicing, the exaltation of the King by those whose lips have been attuned to His praise, and the presentation of the king's daughter perfect in the comeliness that had been put upon her. As we look anticipately on this fair scene, we gladly join in that praise that shall go on forever

and ever, and count it a blessed privilege to remember His name in this generation. We can rest firmly here: whatever may intervene in the way of rough seas and stormy skies will be forgotten in that day of brightness; a day that is certain because it is the due, not of ourselves, but of the One whose throne is for ever and ever, and who wields a righteous sceptre.

It is when we turn to the other psalms that we learn something of the pathway that leads up to that time. But firstly we are to be strengthened and encouraged by the sight of the glory. It is in the light of this glory that we can face the pathway, knowing too that the Lord has been in it before us. That is the order: the joy set before us, the example of the Master, and the same path for the disciple. There are some intimations of this way in Psalm xlv itself: perhaps the myrrh, aloes and cassia of v. 8 would develop in Psalm lxix., and the injunction of v. 10 in Psalm lxxx. Here (in Psalm lxix) we come to that which the Jews could not understand, the humiliation of Jehovah's Anointed. If the glory had been introduced in an earthly way, with pomp and circumstance, it would have accorded with their thoughts, but not with God's. How telling is the compulsion of the Lord's own word—"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" (Luke xxiv., 26). In the midst of a scene where God is dishonoured, anything that is to His glory must suffer shame and persecution, and for this the blessed Lord Himself humbled Himself to submit to all the indignity that men could heap upon Him. The One to whom we have looked in Psalm xlv. is the One also before us in Psalm lxix., and we have to learn that this way became Him, for it was the compulsion of God's glory, which we had given up, that brought Him into shame, reproach and dishonour. It is this that is calculated to touch and enlarge our hearts; food indeed not at all according to the world's taste, but God's manna, Christ once humbled here. Twice at least we are called in the Epistle to the Hebrews to consider Him; once as the One who was faithful, glorifying God, once as the One who suffered the opposition of sinners—opposition aroused by His faithfulness, and that we have expressed here in Psalm xlix.

Psalm lxxx. finds the faithful in the same pathway: perhaps not with full understanding, but fed with the bread

of tears, wasted by the boar out of the wood and devoured by the wild beast of the field. We may look around and see something of this state today among the people of God ; we may prove individually how bitter it is to drink tears in great measure. But these sorrows are illuminated for us by the knowledge that this is the pathway that the Lord has trodden ; if there is grief and sorrow for us here so He too was afflicted after the same fashion, apart from sin. But we have this supreme consolation that He now lives for us, able to sympathise with our griefs whether they be individual or the sorrows that belong to those who, like Merarites among us, are concerned with the care of the churches. It is, in fact, because He has been in this pathway that we are found in it : the more closely we cleave to Him the more will this be the character of our way. It is suffering as a Christian, as a disciple of Christ, and will draw us closer to Himself, will teach us the true value of transitory things and give us to depend more wholly on " the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man who thou madest strong for thyself."

It seems to me then, that here we have a sight of the Lord with His own in the blessedness of His presence (Psalm xlv.) followed by the witness that He trod a path of suffering before He was given His supremacy (Psalm lxix.) and that those who are to be associated with Him in glory must tread a similar sorrowful way (Psalm lxxx.). And the consciousness of this, not as something theoretical but as entered into practically develops a full affection for Himself and proves for His delight. Inasmuch as Christ Himself is our food we are fed by every appropriation of Himself ; but perhaps we may say that that which touches His sufferings is dearest to His heart. It was at any rate the desire before the Apostle who wanted to prove the fellowship of His sufferings, to follow after, in order to understand why he had been taken hold of by Christ. He pressed on ; so would we.

The sight of Christ in glory is a blessed one. He is there a Lamb as it had been slain, to touch our hearts with the knowledge that this One was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death on our account. He does not forget those sufferings and He brings us back Lord's Day by Lord's Day to contemplate them : they will be before us in the glory. But we may enter more fully still into what He endured as we walk faithfully and humbly in His steps,

disciples becoming like their Lord and sharing His rejection, sorrows and reproach in this scene. Then it is that we prove His companionship and sympathy in our griefs; then we appropriate more of Himself; then, drawn by Himself away from all other attractions, do we feed upon the lilies.

We know only too well that our failure is to forget our first love, to forget our Lord's love, to avoid His reproach and to boast in self-sufficiency. May He bring us to consider Him in His present blessed elevation, and to trace again and again His earthly path so that we may be encouraged to walk after Himself, leaning upon the Son of Man made strong. By taking this as our continual meditation, the daily food that He would provide, we may in His grace develop that fulness of affection that shall be for His delight when He comes down into His garden, to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies.

SOME NOTES ON PHILIPPIANS IV.

Chapter iii of this Epistle has given us the walk of the believer. It embraces the pathway of the Lord Himself (v.10) with the same goal before us—the glory. We are to manifest that which is suited not merely to that scene, but to the One who is now there, and for whose return we wait. Chapter iv is our stand, the ground beneath our feet, the assurance not only of that which is not seen, but rather perhaps what has been proved.

Note 'stand fast in the Lord' and 'the same mind in the Lord' (v. 1 and 2). This shows our attitude to all things. There is only one stand, only one mind for the disciple—that of his Lord. And this title here emphasises the claims He has over us and the practical unity that should exist between the individual and Himself (v. 1) and between us collectively and Himself (v. 2). The safeguard in every case is holding the Head. 'My joy and crown.' We have a stake in the spiritual well-being of everyone who comes under our influence. Compare I Thess. ii. 19. The joy to-day—"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 Jn. 4); the crown on the day when all things will be made manifest.

Not the answer to our requests, but the peace of God is promised (v. 7). It is the peace of absolute superiority, just as in "the Lord sitteth upon the flood" (Ps xxix., 10).

“Hearts and minds.” If the heart is right all else follows. Out of it are the issues of life. Thoughts, too, are controlled if we let the Lord have His place. For the mind is subject to our own control, so that we are exhorted to ‘Let’ this mind be in us (Phil. ii. 5) as also in many other passages. We are not to allow anything to hinder the power which will work in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Therefore there follow six things wherewith to occupy our minds (v. 8). But we must see that of itself this is incomplete. It is like faith without works. The perfect seventh is required to complete the exhortation, and the seventh is active, it is a “doing” (v. 9). This sums up thought and deed, it is comprehensive. How blessed for Paul to appear before the saints as such a pattern of his Lord that they could follow Him. How do the saints see us?

If the peace of God follows the committal of all things into His hands, the God of peace Himself is with those who are obedient. Father and Son come to abide with him who obeys (Jn. xiv. 23) – not merely thinks but acts. This is fellowship in superiority, the sweet rest of His presence compared with the restless striving of the potsherds of the earth. It is Abraham’s place on the hills when Lot had gone to the plain.

Now in this also Paul is able to show himself a pattern. Over every circumstance he is triumphant—all things are possible through Christ. And he has so proved the power of all that he has written that he can assure them not only in the name of the God of peace, but rather ‘my God’ (v. 19). For he knew Him in whom he had believed.

FOLLOW AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS.

It is marvellous grace that is shown to us, that we are called to be disciples of Christ at the end of the present period of grace. There are not, in this country at least, the dangers attendant on Christian discipleship that had to be met by the early confessors of Christ. On the other hand, there are more complexities confronting us; we may be more readily ensnared in some pitfall set for us; there are the world, the flesh and the Devil against us, even though these may assume different forms than in former times.

At one time it was usual to hear that the Church was in conflict with the three adversaries just named ; now, it is feared, these occupy principal places in that which nevertheless they work to destroy.

There is one great comfort for us, and that is, that the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who directed His saints at the beginning, is able to do the same for us now. He has caused that Scriptures should be written expressly suitable for the last days ; the very days in which we live. Special among these are the two epistles to Timothy, from which we may now seek to derive a lesson, which we shall name " righteousness, personal and relative." In our individual, private lives, we are expected to live soberly, righteously, and godly. In our fellowship with the people of God, in worship and in service, the great principle for the last days appears to be righteousness, as may be seen from its frequent mention in the two epistles named above.

Before coming to the use of the actual word righteousness, let us note why Paul wrote to Timothy. It was that he " might know to behave himself in the House of God, which is the Church of the Living God, the pillar and the ground of the truth." Then, we might have thought, the instructions of chap. v., would suitably have followed. The Apostle, however, writes one of those wonderful statements of which the Scriptures seem so full. He speaks of the mystery of godliness, and follows with a statement concerning the Person of Christ and what was true of Him from His birth to His entrance into Glory ; His being received up in Glory. This seems to suggest that it is the Person of Christ : His incarnation, life, ministry, ascension ; indeed, all that is written concerning Him, that is to be the subject matter of all christian fellowship, ministry and service. This is a wonderful consideration for us ; but also a great relief, for we have not to puzzle our brains to find something new or novel wherewith to engage the minds of saints, but rather to speak of Christ. It is also a great comfort to know that if our minds are set on this, the Holy Spirit is here for the same purpose and will help us. Remembering this, we may proceed to the various verses which speak of righteousness.

In chap vi., verse 11, the Man of God is warned to flee the things which follow in the wake of love of money, and to

follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Here, we would say, that personal, or practical righteousness is meant. It is questionable whether we can sin in thought, word or deed, without offending righteousness.

To render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's, would go a great way to keeping us walking in paths of righteousness. Great saints have attended to the small matters of right and wrong; to be careless on this point is highly dangerous for us, and fatal to being 'a Man of God.'

We now turn to the Second Epistle, chap ii., verse 22. In reading this passage it is well to remember a saying that has helped many. It is this: "In the First Epistle we are told how a man should behave when the House of God was in order; in the Second Epistle, how to behave when the House is in disorder."

The sad feature of our day is that vessels to honour and vessels to dishonour are found in the House of God, or, as we may say, in the profession of Christianity. In some circles are to be found those who deny the foundation facts of the faith; in other circles those who have ventured too far and have brought confusion into the minds of those whom they ought to have edified.

The 'man of God,' old or young, is to purge himself from these vessels to dishonour; flee other things, and follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, along with others who have done the same. This has been called "ecclesiastical righteousness," or "relative righteousness"; righteousness in my relations with other believers as regards service towards God; surely also in collective worship. As in our first passage, righteousness is placed first, perhaps suggesting that it is a guiding principle for the last days. To put a Scripture like this into practical effect is sometimes a grievous proceeding involving much hardship. The difficulties attending such a course may sometimes seem insurmountable. If, however, grace is given for such a step, it will lead to much blessing. It is a thing to be coveted to be a vessel unto honour; to be prepared unto every good work. For instance, a man may speak a word whereby another may be saved; and yet be quite unable to tell that man later how he may worship his Saviour-God acceptably. To tell him that it is immaterial, a

matter of taste or choice, about which he is quite at liberty to suit himself, would not be the way of a sanctified vessel—servant—meet for the Master's use. It would not be righteous ; there would be no faith about it ; it would not be love—rightly understood—nor would it be the way of peace.

It is the unity that the Spirit has formed, not a unanimity of ideas, that is to be "kept in the bond of peace." It is possible for a man in these last days, to be as much a free man as the Apostle Paul himself ; a rare thing perhaps, yet not an impossibility.

In chap. iii., verse 16, we have that grand statement about the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and that they are profitable for . . . instruction in righteousness. There is no position in which a believer is rightly found, but that he may find guidance as to how to conduct himself in it. So complete is the instruction afforded in the Scriptures, that he may be perfect ; he may answer to the mind of God in placing him in that position. There is no good work ready to his hand that he may not enter upon knowing that he will be will be furnished with whatever is necessary for its proper fulfilment. To be a "man of God" is a thing greatly to be sought after. The writer of the Epistle was such, and he knew that he was about to leave the place where "men of God" are needed ; and that he would receive a crown of righteousness from the Righteous Judge, at His appearing. This dear man, accustomed to a path of righteousness, knew that the Lord would not be unrighteous to forget his labours of love. All who love Christ's appearing, walking in view of it, shall receive the same crown at the coming day. Before leaving our reading of this chapter iv., note how this righteous man could discriminate so beautifully, in his references to his companions and others. This has been noted by others. He wanted Timothy to be with him, as he felt that the time of his departure was drawing near, and Demas had forsaken him. Luke the physician, faithful man, still stood with him ; and that lovely reference to Mark recalls the Lord's love to erring Peter. The ministry of reconciliation had been given to Paul ; this as to sinners ; but he knew also how to act towards one who failed ; they were now fully reconciled. Tychicus was not with the Apostle ; but only because he had been sent on some service. Of Alexander he speaks righteously, and warns

against him ; but those of verse 16 are more gently dealt with. Attention to these discriminating words by the Apostle, if taken heed to by the subjects of them, would lead them to judge themselves—clear themselves if necessary— so that they also might look forward to a crown of righteousness being bestowed upon them. He restoreth my soul ; He leadeth me in paths of righteousness, for His Name's sake is true of both Testaments. If earnest enough, we may anticipate the judgment seat of Christ. Paul, in Cor. iv., vv. 1 to 5, seems to say that he did this, leaving, of course, the final word for the mouth of " The Righteous Judge."

' ABBA ' FATHER.

Mark xiv 36 ; Rom. viii 15 ; Gal. iv 6.

The three passages in which this phrase occurs are well worthy of our consideration. In the first we have the Lord Himself before us—would that He were ever before us, that we always considered His example and His blessed ways, mediating upon the outworkings of the life that is Christ and which is now in the believer. For it is this life, a new principle entirely and different in every respect from a natural life, that is the only thing here that the eye of God rests upon with delight. Surely we seek that He may find increasing delight in His own who are in this scene.

" My servant, whom I uphold ; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth " (Isa. xlii, 1). Behold Him, encompassed by His enemies who are to take and to crucify Him. See Him in prayer to His Father, showing full confidence in His power, yet full submission to His will. Not for Him the arm of strength, even heavenly strength—for the twelve legions of angels are put aside not for Him a contrary desire of His own. He had been tried by the Devil, and every bait to which natural man falls captive had proved of no avail before Him who had the law of His God in His heart. His gaze was all above the things of this earth on the joy before Him ; and that which He then refused is given Him in the end because of His devotion (Ps. ii. 8). But now His Father's will sets Him lonely and apart, the butt of all human malice and envy ; and the suffering and shame that such a pathway

entails are accepted by Him because they come from the Father.

How blessed to see the two sides of such a pathway : the obedience which put His will and His glory foremost, and then with it the knowledge of and trust in His love that brings from His lips the cry of ' Abba, Father ' at the very time when obedience had brought Him into the deepest anguish. Was it not a joy and refreshing to the Father's heart both to see that pathway, but above all to hear that name from His lips at such a time ? It was the proof that the pressure of things was but emphasising the loving confidence of their near relationship.

It is something of this that we see in Roman viii. Suffering and pain and groaning—yes, the strife of flesh and spirit, and the opposition of all natural forces to the manifestation of Divine Life. We know not what to pray for as we ought, but that is because the glory of God is dimmed to us by the power of things without and within. Natural desires, our own will, and the hostility of the carnal mind all beset us, until we remember that He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin ; until we consider Him who endured a greater contradiction of sinners against Himself than we ever shall. But through it all, and in spite of known and felt weakness there is a note of triumph— not merely that all things are ours, but that they are made to work together for good, good which is firstly God's glory and then necessarily our blessing. We are led by the Spirit of God—led to the Red Sea, but also through it ; led through the wilderness to learn what is in our hearts ; led through Jordan, but led all the time out of bondage into the practical enjoyment of that blessed place of favour where He was when He said " Abba, Father."

This is not yet to be, it is. He who was ever in the bosom of the Father would have us share the perfect love of that bosom, and in the ever present consciousness of it be found in the same peace as He enjoyed, as we walk not in the power of the flesh nor according to our own mind, but subject to the Father and ever confident and happy in the presence of Abba. The Spirit of His Son has been given us for this purpose, that the name of Abba might be heard upon our lips, and that we, intelligent in the knowledge of the Father's

love, may be a delight to Him here on earth now that His perfect servant is glorified in heaven.

Galatians iv. gives us another side of what God has done. Their relationship had indeed been established—they were all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. But the apostle was in doubt of them, for they were not behaving as adults, but as those still under guardianship. God had sent His Son to redeem them from under the law, that in liberty from every weak and beggarly element they might enjoy the adoption of sons. But this happy place they refused inasmuch as they turned again to those Judaizing elements that had held them captive. Nor does this apply to the saints in Galatia only, but to everyone who knowing or professing the power of a new life, turns back to seek guidance, or provision, or power, or anything at all from the life that has passed away to make place for the new. Any such turning back denies to us the blessedness we had known—that blessing that is the result of moving according to the mind of God, receiving all from His hand and giving Him thanks for all things. It is in this pathway alone that we can savour the Lord's own peace (John xiv. 2), a peace to garrison both heart and mind. If we have left this way, how can we say 'Abba, Father'? The word of God, which never makes a difference without a purpose, does not say that we utter that name under such circumstances; in such a case it says that it is the Spirit that cries 'Abba'. Nothing shakes what God has done, and that cry will still ascend to His ear; but—to our shame—it does not come intelligently from our hearts, but is raised by the Spirit within us. In Romans, in the blessed experience of what had been wrought, the believer could cry 'Abba'—in Galatians the refusal of the liberty of subjection to the Father alone, and in the bondage of subjection to weak and beggarly elements, it is the indwelling Spirit who raises that cry to the Father's ear.

It surely is unnecessary to add much more. The Father receives His portion, whether we enjoy ours or not, but who would not say that the cry of Romans viii. 15, is sweeter to His ear than that of Galatians iv. 6. And there can be no comparison between the two states—the first alone answering to the example of the Lord Himself that we have set before us. It is one of our most precious present privileges

to have fellowship with the Father, and this is dependent upon our own desires to accomplish His will (John xiv. 23). Let us then examine ourselves, let the wilderness way prove our own hearts, that we may be found giving thanks always for all things because they come from the hand—rather the heart—of Abba.

BABYLON. (Rev. xviii.).

You will observe the voice from heaven : “ Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues ” (verse 4). The receiving of her plagues is not the divine motive for separation. Men would be anxious enough about that. But the great thing that God looks for from His people is this—that they should not be partakers of her sins. I would put it to every Christian, how far is he in sympathy with God’s mind touching Babylon and its sins ? How far does he feel the evil of it and judge it ?

Babylon does not seek heaven, but the earth—not the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow, but to sit as a queen and to see no sorrow. Babylon is content with worldly exaltation. If you steer clear of this, Babylon has no attraction for you ; and the present danger from Babylon to every soul is the gradual caring for and allowance in Christians of what man values on earth. Of late years there has been no little change in the thoughts of Christians as to the present enjoyment of prosperity and pleasure in this world. But there is amazing danger in it. For what is the great thought of it all ? Man rising, progressing, exalting himself—man showing what he can do, and how improve ; and this is sought to be connected with the name and sanction of Christ ! Alas ! it is Babylon the great (verses 9-19). In her we see the end of the heart’s desire, along with Christ, to enjoy all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. I do not wonder at an unconverted man seeking to make the world pleasant : Cain did it, and there is such a thing now as going in the way of Cain. These are the people that handle all sorts of musical instruments, and the artificers in brass and iron. It is true that these things sprang up at a very early hour of the world,

but still the Spirit of God does not tell us for nothing that they were in the family of Cain, not in the family of Seth.

Every child of man stands responsible to God, whether converted or not, to own his outcast state as a sinner : he has no right to drown his conscience in the pleasures and glory of the world. But bad as this may be, the thing that God most hates, and that He will judge in an awful and public manner even in this world, is the tacking on the name of Christ to the indulgence of worldly lusts. Is it not the desire, even of many Christians, to have the grandeur and riches of the world at their back? I do not doubt that they heartily wish to have people converted, but they would like to bring their earthly influence along with them. This is the Spirit of Babylon. What the Lord looks for from us is doing the will of God, suffering for it, and taking it patiently. Any of these things which the heart covets will be found to involve the will of man. There is not a single position of distinction or of glory in the world but what requires a man to give up a good conscience towards God. In other words, you cannot be a member of the world, and act faithfully as a member of Christ. If you value and wish to follow the world, you will make all sorts of excuses, and argue for a compromise ; but this only shows how far the leaven of Babylon has affected your soul.

God gathers souls round Jesus—that is, Jesus rejected, and gone up to heaven. Therefore, the Church is based upon these two fundamental truths. She has got the cross, and she is united to Christ in heavenly glory by the Holy Ghost sent down. And the cross and heavenly glory will not mingle with the world. This is the very thing that puts my heart to the test. If Christ is my object, I shall not want the world ; I shall be looking up, it may be feebly, but still looking up to heaven ; and there will be one object that God uses to strengthen me, by giving me willingness to suffer in the consciousness of having Christ in glory. Whenever the Church craves after something else, as the esteem and honour of the world, or even social improvement, she denies her proper glory.

Lectures on the Revelation. W.K.

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