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DISCOURSES

ON THE

KINGDOM AND REIGN OF CHRIST,

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BY THE

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I.

THE PROPHECIES AT THE INCARNATION.

LUKE I. 32.

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.

The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy. After long silence in heaven and expectation on earth, the set time at length arrived, and the Holy Ghost returned in the fulness of His power to the covenant people, to proclaim and bring in the *last days*. Himself the supreme forerunner of the Hope of Israel, He came to end the ages of promise by beginning the great fulfilment.

But He came as the Spirit of prophecy still. While His divine function was to *bring the only-begotten into the world*, and, in the hidden mystery of His power, to give the Son of God to human nature, He announced His coming by tokens of His presence that filled heaven and earth

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with prophetic voices. What He wrought in secret He openly proclaimed; the history of the incarnation is introduced, accompanied and followed by a more glorious chorus of predictions than earth had ever witnessed before. *All the Lord's people are prophets*; and what men fail to utter is supplemented by the angels of God, who combine with mortals upon earth to herald the hour of salvation, and help them to sing their pentecostal joys before the pentecost.

One note, however, governs the entire strain. Whether we listen to the solitary angels of the annunciation, or to the multitude of the heavenly host; whether the priest, or the prophetess, or the virgin mother sings; whether we hear the testimony of Simeon in the temple, or behold the adoration of the wise men at Bethlehem,—one theme is made prominent above every other; all conspire to pay their tribute to the REDEEMING RULER of mankind. And in this the Spirit of new-testament prophecy is faithful to the law that ruled His announcements from the beginning. The old testament, in each of its great epochs of revelation, bore testimony to the coming of a deliverer, *mighty to save*. That was the early promise which shed its measure of brightness upon the gloom of the fall, and prefaced the Bible; that was the note to which the psalms set their various music; that was the prediction with which prophecy, whether in Samuel or David or Isaiah, opened its glorious roll. And now, in the fulness of time, all the

ancient utterances of the divine Spirit are gathered up into one clear and connected series of prophetic announcements, delivered by many voices in few words, but converging to one most pure and perfect annunciation, that the divine-human Lord of mankind had come to accomplish redemption.

Omitting the other wonderful events of this new beginning of human history, let us fix our thoughts upon those which exhibit this one aspect of the incarnation ; as it is illustrated, first, by the end of prophecy announcing the coming Lord ; secondly, by the angelic proclamation when He was given to man ; and, thirdly, by the homage that welcomed His appearance.

I. The last of the long series of prophecies that foreannounced the Redeemer were in their substance and form unlike any that preceded ; thus marking the advent of a new order of things. St Luke presents them to us in three most vivid groups, ascending in their gradation of tribute to the dignity of Christ. First, an angel breaks the silence of ages by predicting the birth of the forerunner, but in such a manner as to make the coming of the Lord himself the true burden of his prophecy. Then follows the central announcement by an angel still to the virgin mother, in which the supremacy of the Saviour's personal dignity and kingly rule is testified in terms that are never surpassed in Scripture. And, finally, the Holy Ghost himself, taking the angel's place, pro-

claims by Zacharias, the last of the prophets, the future and eternal dominion of the Christ.

1. It was the high distinction of John the Baptist among the servants of God, that he alone was associated with our Lord in the roll of ancient prophecy. Thrice in the old testament He is fore-announced as *to come*: once, as an indefinite *voice* crying in the wilderness; then, more emphatically, as a *messenger* sent before the Lord's face; and, lastly, in more definite but mysterious description, as the new-testament *Elijah* heralding the day of the Lord, that day which was *great* in itself and *terrible* in its prophecy of the future. And now, when that day has come, it is the prediction of this forerunner's advent that begins the new revelation. His name is the first that is uttered in the later oracles; and his birth is heralded, like Christ's, by an angel from heaven. But the honour thus done to the forerunner, is done not to him, but to his greater Lord. Every word of the announcement that amazed the humble priest, his father, paid its tribute to the glory of that higher Person whose heavenly birth was next to be announced. *He shall be great*, said the angel, *in the sight of the Lord*: in the sight of that *Lord God*, unto whom he should turn the hearts of many in Israel, and for whom he should prepare much people; of that Lord who Himself fulfilled the angel's prediction by pronouncing that tribute: *Among men that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist*. Zacharias himself afterwards un-

derstood by the Holy Ghost the angel's words ; and blessed his own child as the *prophet of the Highest, going before the face of THE LORD*. Thus the annunciation of the forerunner by an angel, an honour which he shares with other elect servants of God's will, derived all its meaning from the glory of the Being whose herald he was. The greatest of the children of men was raised up in this preternatural way, and amidst these circumstantialities of dignity, not for his own sake, but that his whole life and mission might proclaim to Israel, *Thy King cometh*.

2. After brief interval, the supreme annunciation was made by the same angel to her whose blessedness among women it was to give His human nature to our Lord. And every word of that announcement, which we, like Mary, must receive and ponder in our silent hearts, attests the infinite dignity of the incarnate Ruler of mankind. The angelic declaration gives the sum of divine revelation and the church's doctrine concerning the person and government of the Redeemer.

First, His pure and perfect humanity is proclaimed. Jesus, the Saviour of men, was to be conceived and born of a human mother, and therefore with every essential element of our nature, including its subjection to infirmity and the possibility of death. But He—the same Jesus—was to be the *Son of the Highest*, having no father but God, through the power of the Holy Ghost. The *Son of God* in His eternal generation, the *Son of man* in

His human birth, both names were for ever to be long inseparably to His one person; to be used interchangeably, the former alone by us in our reverence, the latter by Him in His condescension, but both equally His own. Hence, said the angel, in those inexhaustible words, *He shall be great*: not, like the forerunner, *in the sight of God*, but in His own unbounded majesty. *Great*: not only in His divine nature as *equal with God*, not only in His human nature, as head of mankind; but great in His incarnate person, increasing in His own glory and in the glory of His government until the consummation of the end.

And as the angel summed up in few but mighty words the prophecies concerning *Immanuel*, born of the virgin mother, so also he gave the sum of prediction concerning the *increase of His government*. But Gabriel's word is only the text, to be illustrated and expanded afterwards by a higher interpreter than an angel. First, He is the Messiah, seated on the throne of His father David. These words descend from heaven to earth,—from the *Son of God*, a revealed truth beyond the expectation of the Jews, as we must ever maintain, to the *Son of David*, the current Messianic hope when Jesus came. Then, without burdening the soul of the virgin with any announcement of the way of sorrow through which her Son would reach His Messianic throne, He is said to rule over the house of Jacob, the true and spiritual Israel, in a dominion which, unlike the

kingdom of visible Israel, is to *have no end*. Beyond this the angel's commission does not extend. In due time angels will again take up the theme, and fill the world with its echoes. Meanwhile the Holy Spirit himself descends and anoints the lips of the last prophet before the incarnation.

3. Zacharias, the humble father of the greatest human prophet, closes the strain of old-testament prediction. It is his honour to be the first of whom it was said that he was *filled with the Holy Ghost*. His prophetic song, uttered over the infant forerunner, keeps steadily in view the coming Christ. It belongs to the old economy in its phraseology and tone, while it is filled with the spirit of the new dispensation. Zacharias speaks at the outset as *one of the old prophets risen again*; but his closing words might be an extract from an apostolical epistle. To his prophetic glance the Redeemer's work is already accomplished. The Holy Ghost has raised this prophetic priest from his incredulity into the full assurance of faith; and, like Isaiah at the beginning of his ministry, he sees in clear perspective the full development of the kingdom of grace. The advent of Christ is that of God *looking upon* His creatures, *visiting* them to leave them no more, and *redeeming* them with a spiritual and eternal deliverance. That salvation was to be provided *in the house of David*, in performance of the mercy *promised to the fathers*. But it was a salvation proclaimed by the prophets

since the world began, and therefore for the world ; it was *the oath sworn to Abraham*, and therefore an eternal pledge, now virtually redeemed, to the children of faith ; and the blessings of the everlasting covenant are personal redemption from those enemies that make God an object of terror, and strength to serve Him in personal holiness of consecration and righteousness of life all the days of human probation. But whatever old-testament limitation may have seemed to linger in this last prophecy vanishes before the higher influence under which Zacharias blesses his son's commission. In John he beholds *the prophet of the Highest*—the *Highest* and the *Son of the Highest* are one,—and his office would be to herald the Light of the world, coming to pour the dayspring from on high on the nations sitting in darkness, and guide the feet of sinners into the way of peace ; to announce deliverance from no other yoke than that of evil, *salvation by the remission of sins*. But, listening to this closing strain of prophecy, we still observe that the Redeemer's dominion is alone exalted ; and as yet the mystery of the passion is kept veiled. All is victory, redemption, peace. The eve of the incarnation hears no sound but that of rejoicing ; and here it is the *sorrow* that will come in the morning.

II. The Saviour of mankind was born to our race in the silence of night, and men knew it not. Light arose in the darkness of our lost estate that

made this a night to be remembered throughout all our generations, and, as yet, earth comprehended it not ; but the event that men had no eyes to see was *seen of angels*, and they did not keep silence. When the First-begotten was brought into the world *all the angels worshipped Him*. Their worship they paid in secret, and from it they have never ceased. But their annunciation was made openly to witnesses chosen before of God,—witnesses who represented all sleepers who should afterwards be awakened to rejoice in it. But their annunciation is still a prophecy,—a prophecy mingled with adoration, which extols the redeeming dominion of Him whose advent they proclaimed.

1. The shepherds, who heard the first gospel message that ever fell on mortal ears, were representatives of all the faithful whose hearts were prepared of the Spirit. Unconscious that their night was already turned into day, they yet waited for the consolation of Israel. To them this first *angel of the everlasting gospel* was sent to announce the advent of their people's hope. As our Lord himself and His apostles everywhere preached first to the children of the ancient covenant the salvation that was provided for all ; so here the first preacher of the new covenant proclaims a Saviour born for the Jews in the city of David. But, while there is seeming restriction, the word chosen, *to all the people*, would in due time bear its largest and most comprehensive application. And this

first message surpasses all that had yet been heard in its designation of the Redeemer. His name of Jesus is not given Him, for as yet He had not received it ; but He is a *Saviour* in all the fulness of the meaning of the word, and He is *Christ the Lord*. Not only *the Lord's Christ*, but the Lord himself as Christ : Jehovah in His incommunicable attributes. As He had been already named *the Son of God* in a sense that surpassed the highest thought in Israel, so now He is named *the Lord*, directly and expressly, in a sense that none had been as yet prepared for, but which finds its highest illustration in the days that followed pentecost. Receiving the sign that their devotion desired but did not ask, they went to the manger to find this wonderful fulfilment of Micah's prophecy, to discern and to worship in this babe the Ruler of Israel, whose *goings have been of old from everlasting*. And what the angel had preached to them they preached to others, and confirmed the faith of many hearts in their musings *concerning this child*.

2. But before they went they had seen and heard even *greater things than these*. Suddenly a multitude of the heavenly host confirmed the testimony of their leader, and paid the highest tribute to the Redeemer's dignity, both by their presence on the scene, and by the words of their prophetic hymn. Their presence was soon withdrawn. After this wonderful earnest of the interest with which they ever study the unfolding of God's plan in redemption,

they retire no more to be seen until the second coming of the Lord, their Lord and ours. But their song of sympathy with man remains, to be studied and echoed in innumerable songs by those whom it most concerned.

Their doxology is at once prophecy and hymn. Its strain makes heaven and earth one: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to the men of God's good pleasure.* In Christ, that night beginning His new life in human nature, they behold accomplished redemption. *Glory* redounds to God in the accomplishment of His eternal counsel for the salvation of men, in the homage of the atonement to the divine perfections, in the restoration of mankind in Christ; and that glory is declared by anticipation to be rendered upon earth, as it is already rendered in heaven,—heaven and earth being, after long separation, one in the eternal praise of God through Christ. As to man, the prophetic doxology of the angels speaks of *peace*: the peace of a reconciling gospel, proclaiming the divine reconciliation to the world, bestowed upon those who believe in and accept the good-will of God, and who thus become *accepted in the Beloved*. Remembering that the chorus of the angel host only follows the note of the solitary angel, we hear in their hymn the most perfect tribute to the finished work of *Christ the Lord*; declaring that through Him ascends to the highest heavens the glory that the reconciled children of the covenant offer to the God of peace.

But once more we must remember that, though we have spoken of the atonement and the covenant blood, the angels do not include this in their song. They also look beyond the cross to the *glory that should follow*. Their sympathy in Gethsemane is yet a secret, withheld perhaps from themselves, certainly without prelude in their song.

III. The third series of prophecies at the incarnation leads us to the homage which greeted the infant Redeemer after His birth; homage which pays its tribute to His supremacy in the kingdom of grace, as the earnest of all subsequent reverence and devotion. And here we have two scenes that fix our attention, as being fully described for that purpose. Much might be said as to the reception which He met with at the hands of all who waited for Him—from the homage paid Him before He was born by her who called Mary the mother of *her Lord*, down to the simple reverence of the shepherds; but the Scripture is content with dwelling upon the welcome given to the Lord by Simeon, the representative of Judaism, and the Magi, the representatives of the heathen world.

1. Simeon is the reverend type of old-testament piety, waiting for the consolation of Israel. It was given to him to receive a measure of the new influences of the Spirit which were poured out in honour of the birth of Jesus; and under that divine influence he went to the temple to behold the Lord's Christ before he died. His inspired words

when he receives the world's Redeemer and his own in his arms, first express the perfect homage of his individual soul; they then expand into a glowing prophecy of the gospel future; and finally, through a sideglance of benediction on Mary, utter the first disguised prediction of the Redeemer's darker, as well as of His brighter, destiny as the Saviour and Judge of mankind.

Simeon's language, interpreted in the light of Christ's finished work, is the affecting expression of the soul's supreme satisfaction in the vision of the Saviour. It remains for ever on the first page of the Gospel as the symbol of the perfect contentment of the spirit that has found its Lord. The first word spoken concerning Jesus, and in His hearing, declares that in Him man's spirit finds its perfect rest; and it is therefore a word of supreme and absolute homage. To receive Him is to receive the fruition of every hope, release from every fear, and preparation for all that lies in death and beyond it. Simeon receives the salvation of God, and is ready to die; like Moses, he beheld the goodly prospect, and entered not on its full possession. We receive our Lord, not that we may die in peace, but that we may live in the enjoyment of His favour and in the service of His gospel, with the vision of eternal peace for ever in view.

But, long as Simeon had waited, and deep as was his own soul's satisfaction, his words concerning himself are few, and pass at once into the largest and clearest prophecy of the dominion of

Christ that we have yet heard. At the moment when the infant Jesus receives the sign of His perfect humiliation to the likeness of our sinful nature, this first new-testament prophet extols Him in His universal mission as the Saviour of the world. His words are still the words of a Jewish prophet, but are baptised with the evangelical spirit. The salvation he magnifies is prepared *before the face of all people*; thus the salvation of mankind, as such, is placed in the forefront, and the holy mount becomes the centre of the world. Only when the veil is uplifted from the nations sitting in darkness, and the fulness of the Gentiles have seen the great light, will Israel know that Jesus Christ was their glory. These words are the clearest of the incarnation prophecies, and they give the text of all subsequent predictions concerning the increase, processes, and consummation of the preaching of the gospel to the world.

And now first is the glorious morning of the day of Christ bedimmed; *the little cloud like a man's hand* is seen, and the earliest indication is given that the incarnation had an end beyond itself. But here the seer is troubled; his words lose their simplicity, and pass almost beyond the sphere of exposition. Nor do they come within our present design save as they still pay their tribute to the Redeemer's dignity. He who was to be a *sign spoken against*—that is, the despised, and rejected, and crucified servant of God, whose sufferings at the hands of wicked men would pierce the

soul of Mary and of many others—was at the same time the judge of all men's hearts, and the arbiter of all men's destiny. To the prophetic glance of Simeon—a new prophet, quoting and interpreting the old—Christ is at once the foundation on which every man must build for salvation, and the stumblingblock over which the unbelieving fall to their own perdition. His person, His work, His word, His kingdom, are the test of all hearts. The Redeemer in this first prophecy is the judge in this world as well as in the world to come, dividing between the good and the evil in this life before His final decision in the next ; and from His judgment there is no appeal. Here, also, we have mysterious hints of inexhaustible subsequent application. In the forefront of the gospel history, and in its earliest prophecy, the deepest humiliation and the highest dignity of the Redeemer are now first seen in one. But the glory *rejoiceth against* the reproach.

2. As Simeon represented the old covenant receiving the mediator of the new covenant, so *the wise men from the east* represent the Gentile world paying its homage to its future King. The entire narrative betrays its purpose in the design of the Holy Spirit, already *glorifying Christ*. These magi were the *kings who came to the brightness of His rising*: from the region of the most ethereal idolatry of heathenism, they came with their homage to that true Light which they had heretofore ignorantly worshipped ; and, although they knew it not, they

fulfilled a thousand prophecies as the earnest of a universal adoration. Whatever views they might have of the King of the Jews, whatever degree of homage their worship meant, whatever the literal meaning of their gifts, we cannot read the narrative in the light of ancient prediction and subsequent fulfilment without regarding their pilgrimage as the appropriate close of the history of the incarnation. After being manifested in the temple to the two saints who alone welcomed Him on behalf of the ancient people, He is manifested to the Gentiles, welcoming Him in the person of these most dignified representatives, and then retiring to their darkness again until the set time was come for His full and final revelation to them. Meanwhile their coming has served indirectly to bring into vivid prominence that once obscure, but now glorious, prediction of Micah, which, with the new light thrown upon it by the scribes, under divine influence, sums up more amply than any other scripture the divine dignity and the human dominion of the infant born in Bethlehem. Whilst Herod muses what manner of ruler this should be, and the magi go back to wait until He whom they had visited should visit them in return, the Son of God went down into Egypt, and for a long season we see Him no more. But the Son will in due time be *called out of Egypt, and to Him shall the gathering of the people be.*

Thus, brethren, we have heard the testimony uttered by many voices and in divers manners to

the supremacy of the holy child Jesus. We have seen manifold illustrations of this one great truth, that He who came to visit us in great humility came to be our Lord and King. Whatever ministry of teaching, whatever sacrificial service, He came to render, His final object was to obtain dominion over mankind. How He obtained that dominion, at what infinite cost to Himself, and through what awful demonstrations of the sinfulness of sin and the necessity of atoning expiation, the early history does not teach us. All this the coming day will declare. This *holy child* will soon be the *man of sorrows*, and then we shall see that only by self-sacrifice and death—the uttermost humiliation of the cross—could the morning songs of the history of redemption receive their fulfilment. But let us, already knowing the end, bow down before Him who, whether an infant in Bethlehem, or the glorified God-man at the right hand of the Father, is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and present to Him the oblation which is more precious than all the treasures of Arabia—the devotion of our penitent and believing hearts.

II.

THE TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS.

MATT. IV. 1.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.

THE Holy Spirit, who led Jesus up to His temptation, must be the guide of all who approach to study its meaning. To unhallowed speculation it is a wilderness of temptation indeed, where the Lord is tempted anew by presumptuous man ; but to those who submit to the divine interpreter it is the scene of the Saviour's first conflict, in which as our Redeemer He won the earnest of His final victory over our foe, and, as our representative, taught us how to vanquish him for ourselves.

Of His own contest with Satan we are spectators only. Our champion is alone with our foe ; for here, as throughout the redeeming work, *of the people there was none with Him.* As He finished the work upon the cross after all human dependants had left

TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS. 19

Him, so He begins it before the first disciple was called. Of this mysterious conflict we see but little, and that little dimly. The agony in the wilderness, like the final agony, is shrouded in darkness; and we behold only its final issues at the outskirts of the desert. But we see an absolute victory, and a deliverer proved at the outset *mighty to save*. Of His combat with Satan, however, as our representative and pattern, we are more than spectators; we behold Him *tempted in all points like as we are*,—so far, that is, as *without sin* He could be tempted,—and are taught to make His victory the earnest and example of our own.

I. The preparations, the process, and the issues of our Lord's temptation exhibit it to us as a necessary element in His redeeming work.

1. It was prepared for by His baptism, with which it is, both in the history and in fact, essentially connected. The person whom Satan assaulted was the same incarnate Son of God concerning whom, as one in His inseparable natures, the Father had said, *This is my beloved Son*. The same person who went down into the waters of the Jordan as the representative of a sinful race; who received the symbol of the washing away of human sin; upon whom the Spirit descended, as the pledge of His descent upon all who, *buried with Him in baptism*, should *rise again with Him into newness of life*; who thus vicariously fulfilled all righteousness that His people might be able to fulfil it,—was declared also to be the

Son of His Father's unbounded good pleasure, and glorified, even here in the likeness of sinful humanity, as *God manifest in the flesh*. His baptism at the beginning of His official career was the seal set upon the holiness of His past life, and His anointing for His future mission. It was His own *day of Pentecost now fully come*. But it was also His designation as the new head of the human race; as such He is now exhibited to heaven and earth. Human nature is in Him seen once more in its perfection. *Let us make man after our image* has been said a second time, and with a higher meaning. A new paradise opens around this new Man; who stands there alone as yet, His bride the church not yet having taken her beginning from Him. Into this paradise Satan essays in vain to enter; this holy man he cannot overcome: not because a new humanity has been created out of the dust of the earth, inaccessible to temptation, but because *this second Adam is the Lord from heaven*.

The new head of the human race was here revealed as its Redeemer, and His baptism was His first public assumption of His office, with all its infinite obligations. We hear the *Suffer it to be so now*, which silenced the objections of man; but we do not hear the *Lo I come to do Thy will*, which accepted the mission of God. The God-man, the chosen Servant of God, yielded Himself up to the Spirit, to whom is ascribed in scripture the whole conduct of redemption, from the moment of the incarnation to the final offering of the eternal sacrifice. He it was

who unfolded to the Redeemer His mediatorial work, and presided over the career through which *it behoved* the Christ to pass. He led Him, He drave Him, into the wilderness, that He might there bid defiance to Satan, and in His person conquer at the outset the power of sin ; that He might approve in temptation, in uttermost temptation, the spotlessness and perfection of the sacrifice He carried forward to the cross ; and, finally, that He might acquire, by a mystery of experience which we cannot fathom, a perfect sympathy with the infirmities of the nature He came to sanctify and to save.

But it must not be forgotten that the Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness was His own Spirit. He went up voluntarily in the zeal of the Lord to meet our enemy ; even as afterwards the Lamb led to the slaughter was straitened in spirit until His baptism of death was accomplished. Satan was the aggressor when the first Adam fell ; but the second Adam went up to challenge His foe in his own chosen ground. *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ?* could have been the language only of Satan, confronted at length after having troubled the world for ages, invaded in his own stronghold, and conscious of his approaching doom. The Lord presents Himself as our champion ; He will renew the contest of Eden in human nature, but in human nature reinforced by divine strength. He will vanquish Satan, the lesser foe, by the *word of His testimony*, before He goes on to destroy our greater foe, sin

and the curse of a broken law, by the *blood of the Lamb*.

2. The process of the temptation accordingly illustrates its relation to the Redeemer's mediatorial work. It was ordered by one who was greater than Satan, who in an important sense led him up to tempt the Christ, even as He led up the Christ to be tempted. The enemy had but one object in view—to thwart at the outset the work of redemption; but the Spirit designed that the subversion of Satan's plan should accomplish other purposes necessary to human salvation, of which he knew nothing.

It has not pleased the Lord to admit us to the mysteries of the wilderness itself and His forty days' experience before the last assault. We see nothing and hear nothing, until our captain and our enemy meet face to face at the threshold of the desert, before they finally leave it. But the few hints which are given invite our meditation. We may behold in this wilderness, the abode of wild beasts, the dark and disordered wretchedness of the world where Satan's seat is—the perfect counterpart and contrast of paradise—the ideal region of the concourse of the powers of evil. He who was afterwards permitted to throw his enchantment over the mountain scene, and adorn it with all the glory of the world, was permitted to make the natural horrors of the desert the groundwork of an infernal illusion which surrounded the Son of man with all the horrors of the empire of darkness. In what man-

ner the soul of the Redeemer was assailed during his agony—an agony more protracted, though less severe, than the final one in Gethsemane—we know not ; but we are permitted to shape in our thoughts at least what we may not be able to put into words. Let every one do so for himself, bearing in mind the analogy of Moses and Elijah, in *their* forty days' abstraction from the world ; remembering that, after a preparation arranged by himself, and for the issue of which he had waited, the tempter at length came in person to Jesus ; and that, according to the express testimony of two of the evangelists, *temptation* was the characteristic of the whole scene, the conclusion of which alone came within the scope of practical application to ourselves. This *Prophet like unto Moses* ascended no Sinai of transfiguration to prepare Himself, in ecstatic communion with the Father, for His mission with the new law ; here is, rather, the antitype of the *second* forty days, when Moses mourned in the anguish of unutterable intercession for the life of his people, who had broken the law. This greater than Elijah wandered forty days in the wilderness, with a burden and oppression upon His soul, of which the desponding prophet furnished but a faint type when he wandered hither and thither restless in the desert, feeling that he alone sustained the honour of Jehovah in Israel. Faint, indeed, and far distant are these types. The wilderness in which Jesus spent His time was the meeting-place of all the hosts of evil, who beset the Redeemer of men as they had never beset the

founder or the restorer of the ancient law. The communion of His pure spirit with the Father was, if not interrupted, yet distracted, by suggestions and visions to His mind such as we cannot conceive. His contemplation of His great work was fixed, during this season, on its most awful, and, to human sense, unendurable aspect. The mission which, before He entered the wilderness, and after He emerged from it, was the object of His infinite desire, became to His tried spirit here a *temptation*,—a temptation real, though no more to be understood by us than that which in Gethsemane caused His will and the Father's to seem for a moment to be at variance, before they were at one finally and for ever.

When those days *were ended* Satan bade his hosts retire, and met the Redeemer alone. Before we enter upon the processes of his assault, it is necessary that we firmly establish in our minds the following principles. First, the Being who here presents Himself to the power of temptation is still and always the eternal Son of God manifest in the flesh: His divinity is not left behind Him, or hovering over Him, or keeping aloof from His assaulted humanity. The person, therefore, who was tempted in the wilderness *could not sin*: not to try this proposition, but to prove its certainty, was the purpose of the temptation. Secondly, the enemy, like John the Baptist, *knew Him not*; he understood not, but would test, this new expedient of the divine resources. He had been a student of the old testament, but his knowledge did not

surpass that of the prophets. He had been an intent observer of the Lord's thirty years, but was not prepared to understand the attestation which sealed them on the banks of the Jordan. Thirdly, too much honour must not be put on the tempter himself. He must not be regarded as *only* a crafty and sagacious counterplotter of the divine plan of redemption, but also as a proud and presumptuous deceiver of himself. It was the act of his consummate blindness, as well as of his consummate daring, to assault the Son of God; and this set the seal upon his eternal ruin.

But we can hardly suppose even such a tempter to have hoped to turn aside the Redeemer at the outset of His career. His object was, rather, to prove if this wonderful person was so accessible, at any one point of His human nature, to subtle temptation as to afford any ground of confidence in future assaults. This regulated at least the first and second suggestions; in the third he undisguisedly tempted the Redeemer to renounce His mission. In all of them his aim was to induce the Lord to separate His will from that of the Father.

In his first approach the tempter made the evident weakness of Christ's humanity the point of his assault. Whatever else he saw before him, he saw a perfect man,—the integrity of whose human nature was vouched by His keen susceptibility to agony and hunger. He knew that Jesus of Nazareth encountered now for the first time the hardness of His mortal lot. During the time past He

had been hedged round like Job, and shielded from direct assault : *Touch not mine anointed, until His hour is come.* But now He was in the extremity of exhaustion, and the enemy approached Him, to see if He might be induced to yield to the instincts of His weaker nature, and, by providing bread for Himself, take His cause, if but for a moment, out of the hand of His Father. Succeeding in this, what consequences might result in His future career of unknown trial ! All this is, however, disguised under the semblance of admiration and sympathy. *If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.* The answer is immediately given by one who speaks, as the new man, the language which should have kept man faithful to God from the beginning : *It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* Though hungry in the wilderness for man's redemption, He stood there as the representative of man's original perfection. As such He lived not by the will of His own heart, or the command of His own mouth, but in absolute dependence on the will of God, and what proceeded from God's mouth. He had no will for Himself ; in God He lived, and His word was the only law of His being. This absolute reliance upon the breath of God, which Satan had ever hated in man as *faith*, and which he now witnessed in its perfection, took from him all hope of overcoming his foe through the tribulations of His career.

The enemy then asked if this supreme trust might not itself be turned into a temptation. The first man when tempted presumed upon his high relation to God, and thought that nothing could be denied to one so near his Maker. So Israel, elect and crowned with tokens of Jehovah's peculiar regard, was tempted in the wilderness to exalt himself above restraint. Might not this new Adam, this new Israel, be induced to glory in His high vocation, and prematurely make His cause His own? The gloomy wilderness shall be changed into a scene of dazzling grandeur, that Jesus may be tempted to spread the wings of His exultation, and triumph over His enemy before the time. But all this is again disguised under the words of the second temptation, which would prompt the Lord to display His supremacy and confound His adversary by taking him at his word, and by challenging the celestial powers to show Him the homage of their protection. *If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee.* But the Lord's reply was instant. The sublime reliance which spoke in the answer to the first suggestion became now the profound submission of obedient humility. *It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.* These simple words confounded the assailant. They told him that the fundamental sin, common to devils and men, was not in this man; they showed him in Christ the perfection of that which he had always dreaded in man as *humble obedience*;

and proved to him that the servant of God would never be turned from His career by any temptation to which the consciousness of infinite prerogatives might subject Him. Moses and Elijah had both been betrayed by the loftiness of their commissions to speak unadvisedly to man, and tempt their God ; but Satan finds that he now tempts one who is not *of like passions with ourselves*.

The tempter knew not (and some men speak as if they shared his ignorance) that there was nothing in the heart of Jesus that responded in any way to these suggestions ; that they were not to Him temptations at all, in the strictest sense of the word. Else could he never have proceeded to the third assault. The third temptation, in its direct reference to the person of the Christ, may indeed have been an appeal to any latent susceptibility of the blandishments of this world's glory which Jesus might share with all the children of men whom Satan had ever tempted ; but it was still more a direct and final attack of the enemy in his unmasked character. Exhibiting the glory of the world as under his sway, he offered to relinquish it to Jesus if He would only hold it *of* the prince of this world instead of wresting it *from* him. To whatever was man in Jesus, this would be the utmost bribe that Satan could offer. To the Messiah, the deliverer of the human race, whom Satan felt to be near him, it was simply a temptation to renounce His eternal design, to receive the world without atoning for its guilt and

destroying in it the empire of sin. For this suggestion every attribute of Satan has its part: his pride—for thus only was it possible that his ancient dominion over the world could be retained; his cunning—for he thought that this regenerator of the world might offer the slight acknowledgment, and pursue in His own way its salvation, which Satan would know how to obstruct; but, most of all, his self-deceiving ignorance—for he speaks to one who had seen him once *cast as lightning out of heaven*, who was sent by the Father to show that *all this was not given to him*, and who could not, in the nature of things, pay such a being as he was the slightest honour, even to save the world. By this temptation Satan, like Simon afterwards, stood between the Lord and His cross; hence the unspeakable majesty of this first word of authority, which for once sought its answer deeper than scripture, *Get thee behind me, Satan!* But the tempter had aimed to pervert His pure humanity from the supreme worship of God; hence the other words which he heard as he retreated, and which told him that man had vanquished him again, *It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.*

3. Thus was *all the temptation ended*, as it respects both the tempter and the Tempted. The Redeemer, on this side His atoning sorrow, encountered no new or unknown trial at the hands of Satan. The issues of the temptation were decisive; it accomplished the will of God, and the first

agent in man's ruin was thus pressed into the service of redemption. The devil left Jesus conqueror. It is saying but little that he was foiled in his attempt to thwart the purpose of the Son of God. He lost his cause utterly; his reign in human nature was destroyed; the kingdom passed from him. *Get thee behind me, Satan!* was a word of victory, complete and final, over the devil, the enemy of redemption; and the Son of God went on His way to encounter a greater than Satan, Satan's master, SIN—to vanquish *it* in its curse and penalty and power over man. Redemption was not accomplished in the wilderness, because the hour of atonement was not yet come; but it was there decided that no contradiction of devils should ever hinder it. Hell gave up its power; the strong man was bound; the cross, as it regards the unseen powers of evil, was the final declaration of a victory long since gained—the *open triumph* over foes already vanquished in secret.

The same truth is placed under another aspect when we regard the temptation as the trial of our Lord's perfect holiness, and its issue as the enforced attestation of Satan to the sinlessness of the Lamb of God. The active victory was to be followed by a passive expiation. The sacrificial person sent of God at once to prove and to procure His grace to man, could not otherwise restore man to God than by offering up a spotless humanity. The spotlessness of that victim was in every way tested and approved. Heaven was full of witnesses—there

were three upon earth. The Father's testimony, always uttered in the secret spirit of the Son, was thrice audibly uttered. Man's testimony was reluctantly given, but the *Which of you convinceth me of sin?* was answered at last by one for all, *Truly this was the Son of God!* The witness of Satan, the accuser, was of more moment, and that was silently given when he fled from the Lord. *He hath nothing in me*, was met by no denial. If we might suppose a renewal of the challenge and counter-challenge touching the integrity of Job, how much more glorious were the issue here! The tempter, though the father of lies, could not deny that Jesus had maintained the integrity of His human goodness—that He had retrieved the honour of our race in those points in which he had from the beginning offended God. Man had separated his life from the breath of his Maker, and had taken the apple from Satan instead, but the new man had returned from the creature to God. Man had tempted God in disobedience, but this new head of the race had gone back to a perfect dependence upon His will. Man had fallen from the law of his being—the supreme worship of his Maker; but man in Jesus had lived and moved and had his being in God alone. Satan knew that the world must be redeemed; he now saw by what virtue he had been conquered even by feeble men from the beginning. He felt that his hour was come, and that, though *men*, through their unbelief, might share his doom, he had lost *man's race*.

II. This leads us to the second aspect of our Lord's temptation, in which we regard Him as a type and pattern to ourselves. It was part of His discipline to obtain by experience a perfect knowledge, both of the *depths of Satan* as the tempter, and the *depths of man* as the object of temptation; and there is a sense in which His experience must be renewed in every one of His disciples. *Fellowship with Christ* includes His temptation as well as His death and resurrection. Our crucifixion with Him, and participation in His risen life, attain their perfect issue only through the process of being tempted and conquering with Him. In this sense He is not alone with our foe in the wilderness. He takes us all with Him that He may *teach our hands to war and our fingers to fight*. The lessons which this scene impresses upon us are manifold: we learn the necessity, the dignity, and the true character of our own temptations; we are taught the secret of our sure defence; we learn to estimate our responsibility as imitators of a pattern who does not vicariously conquer for us; and we are assured by His example of the glorious result of our faithful endurance.

1. The christian, like his Lord, is led up by the Spirit to be tempted. The Spirit of Christ subjects the regenerate nature to testing, which He will overrule for its establishment and perfection. The unregenerate soul dwells in the wilderness—is led hither and thither by Satan *at his will*—sins by the free law of his unholy nature, and is not, in the

exact sense of the word, tempted at all. The seduction exercised upon him is from the Spirit of God, and its aim is to allure him by divine solicitation out of the wilderness of sin. But the regenerate has a spiritual character to be tried, and, as the trial of a new and divine nature, temptation is a high and sacred thing.

The Spirit, however, leads him not *into* but *unto* temptation. The christian who enters the wilderness in the Spirit, and who fights in the Spirit, *keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.* When he renounces the defence of the Holy Ghost, he falls; so falling, he gives up the essential prerogative of every new-born soul—not to sin in the hour of temptation; and that comes to pass which the Lord bids us with all our soul to pray against. He is led *into temptation*, when the Spirit designed only to lead him *unto the test*. A soul united to Christ by living faith, and being one spirit with Him, is led into the wilderness by the same necessity, under the same sanction, and with the same glorious prerogative of conquering as his Master was. Christ has magnified temptation, and made it honourable; it is, whether in Him or in us, humiliation to be tempted, but humiliation glorified without shadow of sin or shame.

Again: The process of our Lord's final temptations was so ordered as to exhibit to us the process of our own:—not, of course, in their endless diversity; for who does not see that *that* could not have been the meaning of His being *tempted in all points*

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like as we are? but in their profound principles. The Lord teaches us this, when He translates back each of Satan's suggestions into words which express its true significance; and, accordingly, we shall understand each of them better in the Lord's replies than in the enemy's challenge.

Thus, for the first of them. Satan tempts the needy christian to distrust the providence of God, to throw off his entire dependence upon the provision of heaven, and to seek his bread in his own way. Our Lord's reply goes to the root of that temptation, and shows that Satan would seduce us to forget or renounce the first eternal principle of religion—that our life, in all that word includes, is from God, and in God, and by God. On the one hand, he tempts us, by ten thousand reproductions of the original apple, to find our happiness out of God, to separate our life from His breath, from His word, from His Christ, who is His word, and the *bread of our life*. On the other hand, and as the correlative of this, he tempts us to loathe and murmur at those privations and tribulations which the Lord sends, as He sent them to His people in the desert, to teach us that *man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*—that is, by direct communications from His Spirit to ours. If we take Satan's literal words as the measure of his temptation, how wide is their application: In how many ways does he tempt God's poor and afflicted children to distrust their unseen Father, and strive

to make the stones of earth a substitute for the bread of heaven! But if we interpret it by the profound reply of Christ, it is a temptation which comes home to every son of God upon earth; for where is the christian whom Satan tempts not daily to forget that his life is *hid with Christ in God*—that its springs are below the nether and above the upper springs of this world's good,—in God himself!

The second temptation is addressed to man, not in the humility of his disciplinary lot, but in its exaltation; to the christian, not in the stony valley, but on the pinnacle. As it proceeds out of the mouth of Satan, (for our Lord suggests to us this antithesis throughout,) it is an enticement to presume on the keeping of God in paths which man wilfully chooses. And grievous are the wanderings from his appointed way into which this misleader of men's souls seduces the christian servant of God! But our Lord's reply goes to the root of this temptation likewise. It is the endeavour to make an accepted son of God tempt his Father in heaven. And where is the child of God upon earth who is not daily thus tempted to tempt his God,—even as His first created children presumed upon their prerogative in the garden, and His people trifled with His majesty in the desert? This temptation, alas! like the others, finds its best and its worst comment in the sins which dishonour God in His church;—in the spiritual pride which tempts the Lord to withdraw his gifts;

in the presumption which trifles with danger, and dispenses with safeguards, trusting in an unpledged protection ; in the secret and daring confidence of many backsliders in heart, that whenever they repent God will freely receive them ; in the hidden or open antinomianism of those who tempt Christ by making Him *the minister of sin* ; in the lighter but still most perilous folly of those who think that their liberty absolves them from the necessity of ordinances, sacraments, fastings, and habitual prayer ; in the presumption of those who leave the path of humble duty to rush into ways to which neither God nor man has called them ; in the unnumbered forms of compromise with the fashions of the world ;—and, to sum up all, in the spirit, conduct, and lives of those generally who forget that the privileges of grace belong to the lowly in heart, and are to be maintained only by walking humbly with God. Satan, who tempts us to forget that out of the mouth of God proceedeth the word on which alone we *live*, tempts us also to forget that out of that same mouth proceedeth the word at which we must *tremble*.

The third temptation offers to man the glory of the world,—all that St John subdivides into *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*,—on the condition of a sinful compliance with his will. But the full force of this mighty and universal temptation is not understood until we interpret it by the light of the Lord's reply. Applied in its naked and awful form, how many have been its

victims ! How many, taken up by the enemy to some tower or higher mountain, have been beguiled by his enchantments, and have bartered their religion and their souls for the vanities of the world, or for things good in themselves which have become sin by passing through his hands ! But, when we behold the temptation in the light of our Lord's sublime reply, who does not feel that it is one which pervades the whole of his life, and touches him at every point of his affections ?

Our Lord has taught us in the wilderness that the weapons of our unfailing defence are in the word of truth. He did not resist Satan by any utterance of His supreme majesty and authority, but by opposing to his lying suggestions the pure word of God. And, although He brought with Him new and as yet undisclosed scriptures for man, He did not take from them His weapons. He used the ancient oracles of truth, taking from them three several sayings, the meaning of which is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ; the truth of which is for time and eternity. He who would use God's word as his defence must live, and move, and have his being in it. It must give him all his principles of action, and sway his whole life by its influence ; making him wise unto salvation—not only wise to find the true blessedness of life, but wise to overcome all its temptations. The words chosen by our Lord were three central words ; and each of them has a thousand commands, warnings, and promises ranged under it. But inasmuch

as the temptations of Satan come to us in detail, and must be met one by one, it is needful that the tempted soul should have in readiness the individual word of law, or threatening, or promise, wherewith to meet the adversary in the prayer of faith. There must be no reasoning with Satan, on the one hand ; no despising of his temptation, on the other : but the simple and resolute appeal to the word of God,—and this, not as our Lord confronted Satan with it directly, but used against the enemy through the medium of prayer to God. The more habitually we live in the *word*, making it our own through meditation, and fasting, and prayer, the more readily shall we find the right *words*, the chosen pebbles wherewith to smite this Goliath. But the three words of our Lord may in time of need stand for all the rest.

Once more : The contemplation of our Head in the wilderness should constantly remind us how much He expects from ourselves. By passing through it, He has sanctified and disarmed it likewise of all superhuman terrors. He has seen to it that there shall be no assaults, devised by Satan, but such as are *proper to man* : all beyond that He exhausted Himself. He has left the wilderness, but He knows every one of its darkest recesses ; and He is still present in the Spirit, watching, animating, and helping His followers in their lesser conflicts. He does not save all ; for every one who would conquer must fight for himself the good fight. He is no vicarious conqueror in those

temptations which are *common to man*,—only in those which were *proper to Christ*. Hence many fall whom He never raises again. Many turn the stones into bread, and die ; many have tempted Christ, and have been dashed to pieces in their presumptuous way ; many have worshipped the Beast and his image, and their carcasses have fallen in the wilderness. He that does not fight this good fight successfully, after my example, for my sake, with my help, and to win my great reward, *is not worthy of me*.

Finally, we see in the triumphant issue of our Lord's temptation the pledge and earnest of the triumphant issue of our own. The Redeemer rested from His long and sore conflict, and angels ministered to Him. He went on His way of humble obedience, in the consciousness that this first victory was the pledge of the last, after which all things should be put under Him. The enemy returned again, but never as a personal, visible adversary of Christ, hoping to conquer. *I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven*, was not merely an allusion to what the eternal Son had seen before the foundation of the world ; it was the expression of His sublime assurance of victory, given partly in soliloquy, partly in explanation to His disciples, when through His name they had cast out devils.

But Satan returns to Him again in His members : for in all their temptations He is tempted, and He regards all the assaults of the enemy upon

His disciples as aimed at Himself in them. Therefore His sympathy with them is beyond the power of human words to express. His angels minister to them, not only after, but in, their conflicts ; nay, He himself is ever with them, renewing in their fidelity His own triumph over Satan. The throne of His own victory shall be large enough for all who overcome ; for it was not of the apostles only, nor of His own tribulations on earth, that He thought, when He said, *Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations ; and I appoint unto you a kingdom.* The same captain of our salvation, who is with us in the wilderness, is also in that paradise which He has regained by His own victory. There He receives all who are faithful unto death ; welcoming them first as faithful soldiers of the cross, before He finally rewards them as faithful servants of the gospel. And they who enter there are tempted no more ; for the flaming sword, which once kept man from the earthly, keeps Satan for ever from the heavenly paradise.

III.

THE FIRST PROMISE.

JOHN I. 50, 51.

Thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

From this time forward. These words mark a sublime epoch. Spoken by our Lord to the first circle of disciples that ever gathered around His person, they stamp the present *now* with infinite interest in its relation to the past, and in its relation to the future. In this hour of rejoicing the Saviour receives the first-fruits of His desire in the salvation of men ; and men have found the first-fruits of their satisfaction in their Saviour. The past of expectation and waiting has ended, for Him and for them : the fellowship between Christ and His people has begun. But this is only the

earnest of an eternal communion ; and the words which welcome the first disciples pass into an unbounded prophecy of greater and still *greater things*.

Such is the general significance of this occasion. Let us further dwell upon it as a glorious end which merges into a still more glorious beginning.

I. St John has here given us the opening of our Lord's communion as the mediatorial Redeemer. Himself the first, or one of the first two, who called Jesus Lord, he describes most minutely the history of this earliest of the *days of the Son of man*. Five souls are brought to His allegiance ; and the manner of their coming and reception, the mutual seeking and finding which has this happy issue, is so set forth as to make the record as full of instruction as it is of interest. Let us look just at the Lord who receives His disciples, then at those who come to Him, and lastly at the communion between Him and them which was that day begun.

1. The central object, here as everywhere, is Jesus Himself. Most vividly has the apostle marked Him out to us *as He walked* alone, without any follower, waiting for His Father's first gift. All things were now ready ; the preparations for His kingdom were complete. He had been baptized by the Holy Ghost and by the human ministry of John, for His Messiahship ; He had been led into the wilderness to undergo another

baptism, the prelude of the last fiery trial, and had come back again to the scene of His ministry, already in a certain sense *made perfect through suffering*. And now He stands in tranquil majesty, the centre of an attraction that will soon be felt by many prepared souls, and that will go on to increase until He will *draw all men to Him*. But as yet He is the Lord without an avowed disciple; *of the people* who should in multitudes that no man can number surround His person and glorify His name, *there was no man with Him*. And how will He win His disciples? The narrative answers this question by showing that He waits as a Saviour for those who are sent to Him by the ministration of repentance, while at the same time He seeks them Himself.

The first announcement which sent men to Christ was this, *Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*. The sovereign secret of the Lord's attraction is the mercy that is treasured up in Him for the remission of man's offences, and the removal of man's iniquity. Although the disciples of the Baptist knew not the full meaning of their earlier master's words, they were pledged to repentance and faith in the Messiah; and when they followed Him, He waited for their coming, burdened with their sense of guilt, and animated by the hope of salvation. It was then, and it still is, as the Lamb of God that Jesus draws to Himself the children of men. As the Lamb on the way to His sacrifice, He drew the

first disciples ; as the same Lamb *in the midst of the throne* He draws them still. He is the living centre of a congregation for whose sins He has atoned, and whose souls He has washed in His most precious blood.

But He who takes away our sin *seeks* as well as saves the lost. The minister of repentance sends his disciples to Christ ; but they find Him not until *He turns and looks upon them* as they follow, and asks, *What seek ye ?* This, the Lord's first recorded question to the children of men, may serve to represent for ever that sympathy with human need, and readiness to anticipate it, which is an abiding attribute of our Saviour. Like the father in His own parable—which contains more of Himself than appears—He goes out to meet the inquiring sinner. And the same unutterable love that turned round upon John and Andrew with this most touching question, still yearns over every poor sinner who says in his sorrow, I will arise and go to my Saviour ! Further, as if to teach this truth still more emphatically, we are told that the day following, Jesus Himself went out and *found* Philip and said unto him, *Follow me.* Thus early does He exhibit in act the great truth that He more than once made emphatic in word : *The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

2. The same lesson will be more fully illustrated when we turn to these five disciples themselves, whom the Saviour rejoices over as the first-fruits of His harvest, the earnest of His great congregation.

First, They are representatives of the devout in Israel waiting for the manifestation of Christ, and prepared for His coming by the ministry of John the Baptist. The earlier company of those who were comforted at the Incarnation had passed away bearing their musings with them. The Forerunner had fulfilled the prophecies that went before on Him, by bringing multitudes under the pledge of a penitent preparation for the Christ when He should appear—a pledge, however, redeemed only by a few. The greater part of the baptized forgot their vows when they found what manner of man they were pledged to receive as their master ; and, like children sporting in the market-place, made both the Baptist and the Christ the objects of their capricious desire and aversion. The promise of John's baptism was not fulfilled : instead of finding the people prostrate in sorrow, and waiting for His consolation, the land needed that He also should take up His forerunner's cry, *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. But a few were the Baptist's *disciples indeed* ; and they were ready, or ever they heard the great announcement, at once to leave their lower master and seek his Lord and theirs. These were the elect seals of John's ministry, and humble and thankful he sent them to Christ, the hope of the new Israel. As such the Redeemer received them : the gift of John's ministry, they were welcome ; thrice welcome as *given Him of the Father*.

Hence they represent all souls that are prepared

by the preaching of repentance and the conviction of sin for the *salvation of God* in Christ. John was not only the forerunner of Jesus ; he was the forerunner of His salvation also, and his baptism of repentance was typical of the preparatory conviction of the Spirit that for ever precedes the gospel. His ministry awakened the sense of sin and the deep desire for redemption in his disciples. This was the impulse that sent these first two leaders of the long procession of Christ's followers into the *way of peace* ; this was the frame of heart in which Jesus found Philip ; and this was the burden of the prayer that Christ witnessed in the wrestler under the fig-tree. That ministry of repentance, which John yielded up to the Holy Ghost in the word, still and for ever prepares Christ's way into the soul, and the soul's way to Christ. None can truly seek Him who do not penitently seek Him ; and in this way *He meeteth* every one who seeks Him. *Come unto me, all ye that are burdened and heavy laden, and I will give you rest*, is Christ's own cry in the wilderness : spoken out of the heart of St Matthew's Gospel to no particular hearers—the one and only invitation that sounds out into the great future—it is for ever the burden of our Saviour's appeal to the heart of man.

Lastly, they illustrate the manner in which the Lord's disciples come to Him. Of these first five, two are sent by the preaching of another ; they hear the Redeemer announced, they see Him exhibited to them as the Lamb of God, and they

follow the guidance of God's servant. Two seek their fellows, and communicate the glad tidings, *We have found Him of whom Moses and the prophets testified*; they win their brethren's souls for Christ, thus confirming and augmenting their own joy, while they obey the purest instinct of brotherly love. One is directly sought by Christ Himself, and follows Him without a mediator. But all find their common and equal rest in Him who gives Himself to their faith, and satisfies, at once and as the earnest of a deeper satisfaction, their every desire. So it is still and for ever. The Lord's servants are always pointing penitents to the Lamb of God; He never forgets His own joy to *seek* and to save the lost; and those who have found Him to the salvation of their own souls are, by the very law of their consecration, urged to tell all within the sphere of their influence, *We have found the Lord: Come and see* for yourselves.

3. And what is this first fellowship, sealed between Christ and His firstborn disciples? He is their accepted Lord; and they are blessed in their faith.

It was reserved for the last, though not the greatest, of these five to declare on behalf of all what Jesus was to their devotion: *Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel*. Like Simon Peter afterwards, he who uttered this first supreme confession was taught of the Father; and his testimony, as it is an echo of the angelic ascription at the incarnation, so it is the keynote

of the homage our Lord receives throughout the gospels, and will receive for ever. These first disciples had found the Messiah, and more than the Messiah of Jewish expectation ; they had found the *Son of God* incarnate ; *the King of Israel*, whom they afterwards knew, if they knew not already, to be the Ruler of mankind. Thus, the first devotion of the christian congregation to Christ honoured Him as *the Supreme Lord*. They who offered it did not yet understand in what sense He was the Lamb of God ; nor did they clearly apprehend the full meaning of His eternal Sonship. They had only begun to receive their heavenly illumination ; but the first light that fell upon their Saviour's person disclosed to Him their divine Ruler. And He accepted their supreme homage to His divinity and dominion. He began that day the exercise of His eternal reign. These were His first true subjects and servants ; the earnest of the never-ending increase of His government, and of those innumerable multitudes whom He would draw to Himself when the cross should give His attraction its highest strength.

These disciples had found the secret of faith. The same teaching of the Spirit which revealed to them in Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God, enabled them to exercise a perfect trust in Him, a trust which already gave them peace, and which, embracing every new revelation as it came, deepened finally into the full evangelical faith that makes the perfect Christ its own. Their conversation to the

person of Jesus, and the satisfaction of their souls in Him, make them the representatives of all who come to the same Jesus, now more fully revealed. Christ is the object of the soul's believing homage ; the king in the new Israel who receives the submission of every humbled rebel, and rules supremely over the hearts of His believing saints. In His presence doubt expires, hope has its fruition, and the soul in the sweetness of accomplished desire finds rest. As in the case of these, our *first fathers* in christianity, the darkness is past and the true light now shineth. And yet, to us as to them, it is but the beginning of joys. The desire satisfied begets deeper desire ; and, therefore, to us, as to them, the Redeemer, the supreme prophet, as well as the supreme king in Israel, promises *greater things than these*.

II. This first promise of our Lord stands alone in the record of St John. It is introduced in such a manner as to show that it is designed to be at once an encouragement to the faith of these humble disciples, and a prologue to all the wonders of redemption. *Thou shalt see greater things than these*—spoken to Nathanael and to each of the five—rises to the grand announcement, prefaced by the first *Verily, verily*, to the entire company of the apostles, *From this time ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man* : an announcement which was fulfilled to a glorious extent in their generation, but is still

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in course of fulfilment, and will be to the end of the days. These words were hid in their hearts, to be understood at a later time. One of those who heard them—the same who testifieth of these things—has taught us by the Holy Spirit to interpret them as the Saviour's mystical declaration, that in Him heaven was opened to earth ; that the communion between heaven and earth was perpetually open ; and that in due time heaven and earth, angels and men, would be one in Him.

1. The Lord here utters in figurative language the mystery of His mediation, as the Son of God and the Son of man, between heaven and earth.

His words carried His disciples' thoughts back to that ever-memorable night vision of Jacob, when the desolate wanderer from his father's house saw the ladder whose top reached unto heaven, and on which the angels of God ascended and descended. That poor pilgrim, type of lost man, heard in his dream that *in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed* ; and awaking in the morning felt that the Lord had been with him, though he knew it not. The meaning of that dream and of that awaking, our Saviour here for the first time gives us. He ever proclaimed Himself by interpreting the ancient oracles ; and this is the beginning of His exposition of the old testament ; His first quotation from the scriptures that testify of Him. As in Nazareth He found the place which predicted His unction as the Messiah, and began His public ministry by expounding it, so here He begins His

private ministry with the vision of Jacob. He had prepared His disciples for the choice of this type by the words He spoke concerning Nathanael. As Jacob, on his second memorable night, wrestled with God and knew it not,—halting as Israel in the morning under the blessing he won as Jacob,—so Nathanael, wrestling under the fig-tree, was declared by the omniscient Lord to be an *Israelite* indeed, in whom there was none of Jacob's guile. Prepared by that saying, the disciples understood that Jesus was the ladder between heaven and earth; *from that time onwards* they learned more and more to apprehend what His mediation required and signified.

They were *to see* the Son of man opening heaven to earth; and then should their faith be made perfect. Already they may have seen, in some sense, what the Baptist saw, the heaven opened and one greater than angels descend upon the Son of God. One of them, at least, was to behold the glory of heaven transfiguring their Lord. These, however, were but aids to that higher vision of faith by which they were to see the Mediator between God and man opening paradise again to the race of Adam by His atoning death. Until the end these aids were granted them: from the baptismal scene down to the ascension, and onwards into the Acts, angels attest the fulfilment of this prediction. But at length the angels are dismissed, their literal ascending and descending ceased, and the apostles learned the profound meaning of the Saviour's word. They understood that Jesus was Immanuel, *God with us*;

that on His cross He united heaven and earth, reconciled God and man, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Here, brethren, is the object set before our spiritual vision. This is that great mystery of godliness which our faith is to behold and embrace, and rest upon for time and eternity. The lesser miracles are withdrawn; only by report and indirectly we see and hear the angel-attestations; we are shut up to the faith in the eternal Mediator. He is set forth before us evidently crucified: once sacrificed to bring God to us, always our Mediator to bring us to God. And our steadfast faith in His person and work places us on a level with the apostles: the lower wonders that they saw we have not seen; but the *greater things than these* we share with them.

2. But, though *the Son of man* is the great word in this promise, and His mediation perfected in death its leading theme, the angels ascending and descending have their specific meaning. In the vision of Jacob there was the semblance of a ladder: the Lord does not include that term of the description; but He signifies that through His mediation the heaven is *always open to man* upon earth, that abundant blessing answers to abundant prayer, and that Christ's servants have all heaven ministering to their good.

From this time forward is a phrase that, in its wider meaning, refers to the whole period of our Saviour's intercession. The Son of man is in

heaven, still the Mediator between God and men ; He is also by the Spirit on earth, and thus in His own person makes both worlds one. As He threw down the middle wall between Jew and Gentile, so He has rent the veil between heaven and earth, and made of both one new temple, in which He is the high priest, through whom all human worshippers have constant and unlimited access to the Holiest. Jacob's vision of the night is the reality of our gospel day. No truth is more amply attested and enforced in the later scripture than this, that all christians have the same common privilege to enter the presence of God with their worship and their prayers : the same privilege that angels enjoy, though secured to them by a different right from theirs. They are free born, and use no plea ; at a great price we have obtained our liberty, and our *boldness* in entering is *humble* in a sense that theirs is not. But the freedom is the same. Our faith *sees* the heaven opened. The angels who defended with flaming swords the access to paradise place no interdict on our entrance into heaven : rather they court our fellowship, and, by their ascending, seem to show us the way and encourage our approach. Alas, how dim is the vision to too many who hear these words that preface the new revelation : broad is now this way, and yet how few there be that find it ! *Surely*, said Jacob, awaking from his dream, *this is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven.* This is our waking language too ; it is our current theory of the union

between this life and the world above. But we use it like men that dream. Believing that Christ hath made earth to His church the house of God, we enter not its inner sanctuary ; believing that we are ever at the gate of heaven, we live as if that gate were shut. Oh, let us arouse our souls, and pray Him who, here at the outset, promises us this great sight to strengthen our faith and purge our vision, that we may live and move and have our being under an *opened heaven*.

We do not greatly err when we further interpret this promise as encouraging our faith to expect larger and full communications from heaven to earth. We need not make the ascending angels the bearers of our prayer ; that is an office the Lord Himself appropriates. Nor need we make the descending angels the bearers of the divine response : that is an office which the Holy Ghost appropriates. But their innumerable company passing from earth to heaven, from heaven to earth, most aptly signifies the abundant interchange between the court of the petitioners below and the Holiest above, whence all blessings come. There is the sound of abundance of rain from heaven for the thirsty earth in these words ; not the windows of heaven, but heaven itself is opened to the spirit fervent in prayer. And still the ancient condition holds : *Open thy mouth*, open thy heart wide, and *I will fill it*. Surely this was our Saviour's meaning when He uttered this first promise to men who had tasted of His earliest grace

They had begun to behold that long succession of sights which fills this chapter. They had *seen* the only begotten of the Father, they had *seen* the Lamb of God, they had *seen* where He dwelt, they had *seen* in Him the King of Israel: they have the promise that they should *see* greater things than these. What greater things could they see, but the perpetual increase of manifestation and grace that should be granted to their growing faith and intenser prayer. And to every one of us, whatever the measure of our attainment may be, there is still the same abiding stimulant to ask, and seek, and knock that we may *see greater things* than these we have seen as yet.

To this eye of faith, as St Paul tells us, all the angels of God are ministering spirits sent forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation. They are both the symbols and the instruments of the never-failing special providence of God in Christ over all the Lord's believing servants. Their ministry to Himself He has transferred to us; or rather they still minister to Him, and with equal joy, in the persons of those He loves. This most precious secret of our Saviour's mediatorial government is revealed to faith, though too often our faith either disowns or neglects it. But it was most assuredly promised to His servants as part of their future experience, and included among those *greater things* that they should see.

3. This glorious introductory saying of our Lord, which passed from prophecy to promise,

returns at last to pure prophecy again. Uttered at the beginning, it will have its full interpretation at the end, of His earthly ministry. *From now onwards* becomes *Hereafter*; and the Lord foreannounces the day when heaven and earth shall be in the fullest meaning of the word and for ever one.

At that great and terrible day of the Lord, the heavens shall be opened in another sense. The Son of man shall descend to earth, and all the holy angels shall still surround Him, descending with Him that they may ascend to descend no more. His coming will end the long reign of mediation; communications from earth to heaven, from heaven to earth, shall cease. The universal judgment, in which the angels shall perform their last ministry, shall be the final manifestation of the supreme authority of the Son of man, the King of Israel, and Son of God. This great event we all *shall see*; no longer with the vision of faith, as now, but *every eye shall see Him*. And that greatest of all sights that man shall behold this side the eternal vision, the Lord constantly keeps before His people's faith. Dimly foreannouncing it on the first day of His appearance, He most clearly declared it among His last predictions. He taught His disciples to *see His day* in the future and *be glad*, because they should be received for ever to Himself. He uttered it in dreadful warning to His sinful judges: *Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven*; to which His

inspired servant adds, what He himself elsewhere declared, *with His mighty angels*. That dread *Hereafter* seals up all the visions of the revealed Redeemer. It is for an appointed time ; and shall surely come. To those who reject the mediation of Christ, it is a prophecy of doom that shall shut heaven against them for ever. But to those who find access to heaven now by faith, it is a prophecy of promise only. They shall behold their King, and share His final glory, and be with Him for ever.

Let us, in conclusion, return to the scene where Jesus receives His first disciples, and utters His first promise. Let us, while we behold their early homage, and witness the Redeemer's joy over these first-fruits of His power to save, encourage our own hearts to approach the Lord. He is still receiving sinners. His ear is still quick to hear the footsteps of those who follow Him in penitent desire ; and still His invitation is, *Come, and see*. He will, if we come with all our hearts, enable our spiritual vision to behold in Him the Lamb of God that takes away our sins, and the King of Israel who receives our loyal homage. Renewing our consecration to His service, He will renew to us the spiritual evidences that strengthen faith ; He will cause the open heavens to be bright around us, deepening within us the powers of the world to come ; and He will send us on our way rejoicing in the hope of still *greater things than these*.

IV.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

MATT. XVII. 5.

While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them : and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye him.

THE import of the mystery known to us as the Transfiguration was reserved by the Redeemer for the future : it was among those events which *the day should declare*. One of its witnesses, the apostle Peter, has given us the key to its solution : no longer oppressed by the revelation, and *knowing now what he says*, he tells us that on the holy mount Jesus Christ received of the Father honour and glory ; and gives us the full meaning of the words which interpreted that honour and glory. But his interpretation we must carry back to the mount. While the deep import of these sayings is unfolded to us only by the resurrection of our Lord,

we must study them as uttered on the scene of His transfiguration itself. There only have they all their meaning. As the Redeemer was at the beginning led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to undergo the temptation which gave assurance by its issues of His perfect victory over sin; and as at the end He was lifted up on the cross, that He might there achieve His final victory and be exalted in death to His dominion; so here, at the middle point of His redeeming course, He ascended *the holy mount*, that He might receive, and we might behold, the anticipation of His coming glory. We must therefore contemplate this event in its own place in the order of the Saviour's history; though *the vision was for an appointed time*, now that it is unsealed we must study it where it was given, and not merge the glory of the transfiguration in the later glory of the ascension.

The apostle, then, being our witness and interpreter, let us approach with reverence this holy ground, where the night of the Redeemer's humiliation is brightened into the dawn of His coming day. The vision which was vouchsafed to Him from this holy hill was bounded by three horizons: first, He beheld His cross, and was sealed for His sacrifice by the highest attestation of the Father's good pleasure; secondly, He beheld His throne, and received the earnest, in His own person and in the voice which gave Him supreme authority, of His future exaltation; and, lastly, He beheld the final glory in which He and His saints shall

be glorified together when His dominion has secured its ultimate triumph.

I. It is at this period in the Redeemer's history on earth that His cross rises before Him distinctly and as near at hand. Never absent from His thoughts from the beginning, it now enters His discourse with all its awful attraction. Now first we hear Him emphatically predicting His passion; and, having uttered the great word, He takes His chosen witnesses and is led—or takes them up, for the Father's will is His own will in all things—to the mountain where He is once more sanctified and set apart as the perfect Lamb of God, and strengthened afresh for His coming sorrows.

Thus viewed, the scene is the second seal of God the Father, re-uttering the testimony of the baptism, and with more direct reference to the atoning death. It declares that the incarnate Sufferer, now beginning to be the *Man of sorrows* and becoming *acquainted with grief*, with that grief which was like unto none, was, and would ever be, even when seemingly deserted of God, the Father's beloved Son, *in whom He was well pleased*. It thus testified to Him, and to us, and to all who hear, that the sacrifice which the Representative of mankind was prepared to offer, and which to-morrow He would descend the mountain to complete, was infinitely well pleasing to Him to whom it was presented, and who already received it as virtually rendered.

It therefore attested that the sacrifice ready to

be offered on the altar of the cross was pure and perfect ; that this was the Lamb *without blemish and without spot*. The ancient typical victims were brought to the priest for examination, and not till they had sustained the strictest test were they set apart for the holy service. Now the whole life of the great atoning Sacrifice was one continual test and declaration of His holiness. He was forty days and forty nights under the keen scrutiny of the adversary ; baffled then, the tempter again and again returned to find, if he might, in this man the common taint of sin ; and at last came before the offering was presented to make his final inquisition into the Redeemer's holiness. Satan keeps silence, but we hear the Lord's testimony for him : *The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me*. The witness of man also He represented, so far as man might bear it : *which of you convinceth Me of sin ?* But we have higher testimony than that of devils or of men. *The witness of God is greater :* and He on the mount of transfiguration sealed the perfection of His incarnate Son. What high priest but the Father in heaven could avail to examine and approve this Victim ? *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*, was the supreme sentence of approval ; none higher could there be, and none less than this would suffice. It was the voice of infinite Holiness pronouncing upon the absolute sinlessness of the offering that man's substitute was about to offer for man. The Sacrifice for the expiation of the world's offences presented Himself

to eternal Justice as a vicarious atonement; and in the light of this transfiguration was searched through and through, and found perfectly pure. The glory diffused through His humanity was at once the test and the result of the test. The glory fades away, but the sinlessness remains; and the Lamb of God descends from the mountain of sealing with the supreme attestation of Heaven,—*In Him I am well pleased.*

In this vision the Redeemer was not only sealed for His sacrifice; He was also strengthened and fortified for the passion and death which awaited Him. This design is not expressed in the narrative, but it suggests itself to the meditation of every devout mind. And all the circumstances of the scene, with its preliminaries and sequel, confirm the thought. The presence of Moses and Elias reminds us, that they in their day of dejection were led each to his mountain and each to his vision; both emerging from the glory they witnessed with new strength for their mission. The invigoration which those humbler types of Christ derived from beholding the nearer glimpses of the Divine Presence is but a faint illustration of the strength which the incarnate Son of God received from His baptism of glory. His lower nature needed constant succour. The sympathy of His disciples He did not disdain to ask, though in His deepest conflict it must needs fail Him. Again and again, in the mystery of His humiliation, He received the consolation of angels who

ministered to Him what man could not supply. But in His humbled estate it was the never-ceasing testimony of His Father's good pleasure that sustained Him most ; this was the rod and staff that comforted Him in the valley, dark with more than Egyptian darkness, through which He must pass to His throne. This deepest source of the Redeemer's strength never failed ; we feel while we follow Him whithersoever He goeth that it is the secret joy of His soul that the world knew not of. But on three solemn occasions the silent good pleasure of the Father bursts into utterance. At the beginning, when Jesus came up from the Jordan, and was replenished with the gifts of the fulness of the Spirit for His redeeming work, He was sent on His redeeming way with the same assurance that is here given. At the end, when He approached His cross, heaven spoke again ; and, although we hear not the words as distinctly as before, we know better than the multitude what its burden of consolation was. Then on the mount of transfiguration, He received, not for one short moment only,—or, if for a moment, it was a moment filled with an exceeding weight of glory,—the testimony of His Father's steadfast love. He *received*, St Peter tells us, not the earnest of His future honour, but a present honour from on high, in the strength of which He went on His way, *rejoicing as a strong man to run a race*. Hence the deep tranquillity with which, from this day onwards, He began to speak to them of the sufferings that awaited Him.

And we are witnesses of these things. This voice *we heard*, in the persons of our representatives ; and how impressive are the lessons that it teaches us ! It is good for us also to be here. In a certain sense, it prepares us too for the passion ; and, with our present knowledge of its meaning, fortifies our minds to read throughout to the end the history of the atonement. We learn that He whom we follow in the steps of His humiliation is the eternal Son of God, hiding a glory which is ready to be revealed. We are enabled steadfastly to believe, as we witness the proofs of the divine chastisement of our sin marring His countenance more than any man's, that the Father throughout the mystery of the agony of Christ still *loveth the Son*. We are strengthened to hold fast our confidence that, even at the moment when the Sufferer seems to be abandoned of God as well as despised of man, He is still the beloved Son of Him whom He calls in that awful moment *My God*, who is even then supremely *well pleased* with Him. We are taught on the mountain of transfiguration, where this great Son of Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the mount of Moriah three days' journey before Him, that, as Isaac was never dearer to his father than when he meekly submitted to be a sacrifice, so Jesus the Son of God, bearing the weight of our sins and their unspeakable penalty in our stead, was then most assuredly the *Son of His love* when He wrought our redemption by the sacrifice of Himself. And it is with this deep lesson in our

hearts—that we must in our amazed thought reconcile God's infinite hatred of our sin with His infinite love to Him who bore it—that we descend with our Lord from His transfiguration, never to forget, any more than He could forget, the voice we heard—*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

II. The vision of the mount was to Christ the anticipation and pledge of His mediatorial supremacy; and this is a meaning of the scene which, as it directly concerns us also, is more fully expounded both at the time and afterwards. The interpretation is given in act and in word, by word interpreting the act. The Redeemer is exalted on the throne of His glory; the representatives of God's earlier authority converse with Him on the passion by which His throne was to be reached, and then retire; we and all the world, in the person of the apostles, are commanded to yield Him our supreme submission.

I. The dignity to which our Lord was raised is here exhibited to us as a personal honour conferred upon the elect Servant of God. *He received from the Father honour and glory; not only the honour that expressed the Father's infinite complacency in Him and His sacrifice, but also the majesty that should for ever redound to Him as the result.* We are afterwards told by our Lord Himself that the glory to which He looked forward was the same *which He had with the Father before the world was,*

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restored to Himself, and irradiating His human nature; in other words, the glory of His eternal Sonship resting upon His divine-human person. And here we behold the answer of that prayer before it was offered: *we behold His glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*; we see the *King in His beauty*, in the insufferable brightness which we see, and yet see not. His human nature, the vehicle and instrument of His divine power in man's redemption, becomes for a season the *glorious body*, into the likeness of which we also shall be transfigured. The power of His resurrection and ascension is displayed in Him before He has yet died; before the final marring of His countenance, it is here made brighier than the sun; the vesture of His humanity is white and glistening; and He is crowned with glory and honour before He has undergone that suffering of death which was His appointed way to reach it. While Moses and Elias are speaking to Him of the departure that He should accomplish at Jerusalem, He *enters into His glory*, to re-oune it again for a season, but only that it may in due time be restored to Him for ever.

2. The church in all ages has interpreted the presence of Moses and Elias on the holy mount, their conversation on the future passion, and their sudden retirement leaving Jesus alone, as exhibiting in act the supremacy of Christ in the kingdom of grace: the Holy Ghost this signifying, that the suffering and exalted Redeemer was the end of the

law and the prophets. The *decease at Jerusalem* is the common term that unites the dispensations; *Hear Him* makes the Mediator of the new covenant supreme.

Into the mystery of the colloquy between Jesus and His forerunners, the giver and the restorer of the law, the representatives of the law and the prophets, we cannot penetrate. They who might have heard for us had not then ears to hear; they were oppressed by the brightness of the vision, and heard unutterable things. This only we know, that Moses and Elias spoke of His coming passion, as the great fact that made the two testaments one, that united both worlds, and was the end of all revelation. But we must not forget that they speak of it, not precisely in the language of men, but in terms that so to speak transfigure His death; they spoke of the *decease*—the exodus, the departure—that He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Thus the language of this superhuman discourse was superhuman. It testified of death, but of death which was life; of dissolution that was an entrance into glory. And thus they confirm from the other world and on the mount, what we strive dimly to apprehend in the valley below, that the death of Christ was not after the ordinary visitation of men, that it was the triumphant dying of one who conquered death in His divine nature, while He submitted to it in His human nature. That the Redeemer of mankind should expiate sin as the sacred sacrifice for the sins of the world, was the meaning

of the typical economy of Moses ; that He should reign in the glory of grace over a redeemed world, was the burden of the prophets. This was the one theme of the whole old testament ; and its representatives here on the mount of Fulfilment declare that they behold in Jesus Him in whom their types and prophecies meet. They add their tribute to the Redeemer's dignity ; from them also, as from the Father, *He received honour and glory.*

Honouring their Lord they themselves retire ; Jesus remains *alone*, and the voice that cries, This is my beloved Son, hear Him, interprets their departure. They were the representatives of a revelation that had been given *at sundry times and in divers manners* ; and now in these last days the Son of God had come to announce all His will, and execute among men the last designs of providence and grace. *The dispensation of the fulness of time* had come ; and, when the Son of man should be received into His glory after the passion, His voice alone would rule the church and the world. The supremacy of Christ in His mediatorial kingdom is here exhibited under one aspect ; it is that of the Revealer and Lawgiver. Not Aaron, the ancient high priest, nor David, the typical king, nor Melchisedek, the king and priest united, appeared with Christ on the mount ; but Moses and Elias, the representatives of God's government by law and by word. The Saviour is by anticipation the Mediator of the perfected christian law, the law of liberty which was fully established on the day of Pentecost by

the Holy Ghost. But it cannot be too carefully marked that He was not by anticipation only declared to be perfect Revealer ; He is already on the mount glorified as such, though the fulness and universality of His dominion through the word awaited a future day. Christ is Himself the Revealer ; in His word, the completed scriptures, we hear His voice.

The Father's testimony is here given to the Son as the Finisher of revelation. In the deepest sense He was its Beginner as well as Finisher : He, the beloved Son, is Himself the centre of truth ; the oracle of God to the universe, the incarnate *Word of God* to man. Whatever mankind has ever known of God—whether from the teaching of nature, or from the instincts of his own spirit, or from the earlier revelation of truth—has come from Him whose *light enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world*. He is not only the being whom the Scriptures everywhere revealed ; He is also the being who everywhere reveals Himself. But the testimony of the mount declares that in His incarnation He has brought into the world all *the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. What Moses and Elias could not reveal, what no creature that exists could either know or make known, the Son of God has made the common heritage of man's mind. *That which may be known of God*, all the secrets of man's sin and redemption, and *the depths of Satan*, He has come into the flesh to reveal.

And the words *hear Him* declare, further, that

the voice which rules the world is an abiding voice, whose full and perfect utterance is to be heard for ever. Where then is it to be heard? Where are we to seek the final disclosures of revelation, that truth which needs no supplement, and from which there is no appeal? That question the Lord himself must answer. He must speak, that we may know where He speaks. And His constant testimony sends us to the perfected scriptures as His living and abiding voice to man. In them He *speaks from heaven* to man upon earth. As the ancient expounders of God's will were after they departed still heard in their writings,—*They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them*,—so the supreme Revealer has left His word behind Him in which He is heard, and that word includes the entire range of revelation. He made the old testament as we now read it His own: Moses and Elias brought the writings which they represented, *the prophetic word*, to Him upon the mount; *of His own they brought unto Him*, and He made their prophetic word *more sure*, by authenticating its truth and declaring its fulfilment. He himself completed what they left imperfect, and uttered with His own lips all that could be revealed before His passion. He then added to their word and His own the finished revelations of the apostles, led by His Spirit *into all the truth*. In the perfect Bible we have that oracle which on the mount we are commanded to hear. It is one voice speaking by many tongues: *the voices of the*

prophets are His voice ; He perfects by the apostles what He *began to teach* before Pentecost. The entire Scriptures are His voice : the words are His words, the life and spirit of their meaning is the Holy Ghost accompanying them. Thus on the mount of transfiguration we witness the seal of divine honour put on the Word of God : its representatives are Moses and Elias on the one hand, the apostles waiting for their office below, and *Jesus in the midst*.

3. This voice *we heard* in our representatives : it still and for ever commands us to receive, reverence, and obey the living voice of Christ in His Word. He by His Spirit makes the Scriptures His never-failing oracle in the government of the church : the human oracles that interpret the divine are binding in proportion as they are its faithful echo, and are worthless when they displace or supersede it. Let us renew at the mount our confidence in this article of our christian faith. No truth issues from the Bible which it is more needful for us in these days to hear than that which declares that Jesus in His Word rules the church. Let us not give heed, no, not for an hour, to those who would transfer His voice, His living voice, to any other sphere than the Scripture, or to any other delegate than the Spirit. To hear Moses and the prophets was to learn God's will from their writings, and an appeal to them was in old time an end of all strife. Christ our Lord takes their place, with a supreme and not a delegated

authority. We have not Moses and the prophets now, but Jesus and the Scriptures: *let us hear Him.*

And this command each one of us hears for himself. It sums up in one word the *whole duty of man*. We are governed by a living Voice, the voice of the Son of God meeting us at every point of our earthly course. If rebels, still it demands our instant submission to Him. If penitent, it tells us the terms of our pardon and peace. If renewed in the spirit of our mind, it speaks to us our christian duty, and guides us through the details of our probation. Our religion leaves us *alone with Jesus*; nor can we fail of its present obligations, or forfeit its eternal blessedness, while with all our heart and mind and soul and strength we *hear Him* who speaketh to us from heaven in His Word upon earth.

III. A third horizon of glory rises before the Lord and His servants in this scene, and must be embraced in our interpretation of the vision. All its mysterious circumstantials demand that we regard it as shedding its brightness on that final world to which the passion of Christ, and His sway in the church, are themselves only preparatory. On this view of the transfiguration our words must be few: notwithstanding the fuller knowledge that the resurrection has given us, we are still in danger, like St Peter, of *not knowing what we say*. But on one great truth we cannot err.

1. Christ's glorified person is here the centre of the two worlds, and *makes both one*. During those brief hours *life and immortality were brought to light*; and, although the vision was soon taken back to heaven, we may now linger on the blessed glimpses of the other state which it opened to us. As at the incarnation the heavenly host filled the air and were made manifest to man; and as in the visions of the Apocalypse angels and men are seen in far perspective rejoicing together over accomplished redemption; so here, and upon this earth, the *spirits of the just made perfect* are revealed again in their noblest representatives. They are but two; but two that suffice for all: one representing the disembodied souls of the departed in Paradise, the other that full consummation of the glorified body and soul which will be the last act of man's redemption. They appear *in glory*; their own, which, however, is only the reflection of their Lord's; and thus for one fleeting moment they show us what shall be in the future to ourselves, and help our baffled minds to conceive that glorification of Christ in His saints which the later Scriptures delight to dwell upon. The vision thus gives us a most impressive suggestion of what now is, and a most vivid assurance of what shall be in relation to the spiritual and unseen world.

It discloses to us the world of disembodied saints, sanctified and perfected as to their spirits, and awaiting the glorification of their bodies, in virtue of the Redeemer's resurrection. Below them

is the christian church militant in the flesh, *cast down, but not destroyed*; oppressed, but full of the joy of hope; feeling it *good to be here*, but longing for the abiding tabernacle, and at its best speaking words that it cannot understand. And it shows us that *Jesus is in the midst*, the glory of the world above, the hope of the world below; while His sufferings, and the entrance into His glory, are the common and inexhaustible theme of both worlds made one in this communion of saints.

It gives assurance of what *shall be hereafter*. *We made known unto you the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ*, when we were *eye-witnesses of His majesty*. As the coming of Elias, or John the Baptist clothed with his *spirit and power*, was the sign that Christ had come as the *Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world*; so the coming of Elias in his own person on the Mount is a sign to us that Christ will come again, in an advent of which the transfiguration is the pledge, *without sin unto salvation*. In this vision the forerunner and *He that should come* once more meet. The Scribes well said that Elias must first come; he has come, and we look for no other. The Lord's return is at hand. Suddenly shall He be again transfigured in this lower world; and then shall His final prayer be answered. His people shall be with Him for ever to *behold His glory*; and of this coming, St Peter tells us, the transfiguration was to its first witnesses the sign.

2. Once more, *we* are witnesses of these things;

and this vision also remains in our hearts for ever as the vanishing point of our hopes ; a prospect, however, which only gladdens our souls by anticipation in the valley to which we again descend : a glorious vision, but only a vision.

That the disciples were forbidden to tell what they had seen until the Son of man was risen from the dead, was an interdict needful to them for a season, but now more than withdrawn. The *tenour* of the whole new testament permits and commands us to make our fellowship with Christ in glory not merely an article of faith, but an ever-present source of joy. *Ye shall see greater things than these*, was the Saviour's first promise, His *first commandment with promise*. If we have seen with the eye of faith the suffering Redeemer, and if we ever see Him on His throne issuing His laws of life, then we may habitually feed on the hope of seeing Him as He is on that mountain of eternal transfiguration. This prospect is the gospel consolation for the sorrow of this our probationary career. It is the church's solace in the midst of her distractions ; it is the christian's secret joy that the world knoweth not. It reconciles us to the troubles of life, makes christian conflict and duty light, ennobles and hallows time, transfigures death, and makes the future all in all.

But it is now only a *vision for an appointed season*. The scene we behold melted away ; it faded, not, indeed, as an unsubstantial pageant, but as the type fades away before the antitype. The

glory left the form of Christ himself, and the *mar-
ring of His countenance* once more appeared when He came down from the mount of His Father's honour to the valley where His disciples were dishonouring Him. Peter, James, and John descended to the rough work of life, musing on the vision, but not to behold the full reality until *the end of the days*. They must be transfigured first in the spiritual fellowship of the Redeemer's sufferings. So we also, while the joy that is thus set before us is never absent, and while we sometimes ascend the mount where all that is earthly is for a season forgotten, must wait, and watch, and labour, that we may be counted worthy of that coming revelation. Let us learn this final lesson, and so live that, being transfigured with Him by the Spirit of His grace, we may also share the transfiguration of His glory.

V.

THE SIGN OF THE FEETWASHING.

JOHN XIII. 13-15.

Ye call me Master and Lord : and ye say well ; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one'another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

THE event which St John here preserves for us exhibits the union of our Saviour's supreme dignity as man's Lord, and His voluntary self-abasement as the servant of God for man. Christ's meaning in this unexampled scene was partly revealed at the time, partly reserved for the *hereafter* of deeper explanation ; and we, who can now enter fully into His intention, are taught to consider it as an action terminating a life of service on earth, and foreannouncing a new career of service in heaven : both, however, rendered to man as his Master and Lord.

It thus brings into the clearest and most affecting light the ministry of redemption as a *divine* ministry ; and the Saviour's lordship over His people as the lordship of a self-sacrificing *service*. As a symbolical action, preaching its lesson partly in deed and partly in word, and reserved for the immediate precincts of the passion, it must first find its interpretation in the cross where man's Lord became his servant unto death. Viewed then as a sacred service performed upon the disciples, it exhibits the bond of union between Christ and His cleansed people. Lastly, regarded in the light of an example, the last example set before the passion, it must find its illustration in the bond of brotherly love and service which our Master thus establishes among His followers. May the Divine Spirit, the Interpreter of the great *Hereafter*, aid us in meditating on these meanings of our Saviour's last symbolical act.

I. The first design of the Feetwashing required the cross for its interpretation.

The hour of the passion had come : *the end* to which the Lord constantly looked forward, and to which He had sought, though in vain, to direct His disciples' minds. Only a brief evening remained wherein He could hold fellowship with them, and prepare them for the future. Yet a little while, and He would be in the hands of His enemies, and be forsaken, for a season at least, of His friends. Hence, what He had to say, what

He had to do, must be *done quickly*. Short as the evening was it was crowded with solemn and important instruction : the most memorable evening upon which the sun ever went down, and the eve of the most memorable day that ever dawned. First came the acted lesson of the Feet-washing, to be fully explained afterwards ; then the holy supper, to be the abiding commemoration of His death and pledge of fellowship with His risen life ; then the long discourse of final revelation ; and then *the end*. But all that passed within that antechamber of the passion, every act and every word, had more or less direct reference to the morrow. A thoughtful consideration of the scene will show that our Lord's girding of Himself to minister to His servants most emphatically pointed to the cross, and was in fact a symbolical rehearsal of His last great act of obedience.

1. *Thou shalt know hereafter* was a significant word that referred to very much more than the act of humiliation performed on Simon Peter ; it intimated that the mystery of the whole strange scene—the like of which, or anything approaching to it, had never occurred before—would be fully explained by the morrow. Then would the servant of God and minister of man's redemption reach the lowest point of His submission, and offer His final oblation of humility. The feetwashing began the eve of the sacrifice ; and, interpreted by the passion of which it was the symbol, and by the tenour of later Scripture, gives us an impressive

illustration of that one aspect of Christ's redeeming work in which it was a self-renouncing and self-sacrificing service to man. The Scripture gives prominence to this among other views of the Saviour's relation to our race. Everywhere He is a servant: in the old testament, however, specifically the Servant of God; in the new testament the minister to man. *Behold my servant whom I uphold* is one of the most emphatic designations of Christ in ancient prophecy; and this language of God himself, speaking to us of the Messiah, was not used once only and in figure, but pervades the whole current of prediction. When the Redeemer came into the world, and entered upon the public ministry for which He was so many years silently preparing, He made His life an illustration of that servant-name. Not often indeed did He use the word; a *servant* He never called Himself, whether of God or man; He only spoke of His *doing the will of His Father*, and of *ministering to man* by giving His life a ransom for many. But the service itself ruled His entire career. Whatever else He was He was our minister; preparing by the lesser ministries of teaching and benevolence for that supreme ministry which absorbed all into one—the bearing our infinite burden for us on the cross. The later Scripture dwells much, though with reverent reserve in language, upon the mission of Christ to *serve* our race. Never introduced, save in connexion with the counterpart of His majesty, it is yet most distinctly, and in the clearest

language, expressed. The apostle Paul gives us a specimen of the whole, when he says : *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God : but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant.*

In the washing of His disciples' feet the Lord acts over the whole mystery before us ; none can doubt His intention to do so who remember how constantly it was His pleasure to teach His will sacramentally and by symbols. In this light let us behold and interpret the scene. *He riseth*, it is said, in the full consciousness of the majesty of His person, *and laid aside His garments, and took a towel and girded Himself* ; even so He left the bosom of the Father and *emptied Himself, and took on Him the form of a servant, and was made man, clothed, though more than clothed, with our nature. He poureth water into a basin*,—but this water is once again changed, not now into wine, but into blood,—and began to *wash the disciples' feet*. He humbled Himself to what would have been the lowest degradation, had He not translated the act into glory,—the bearing our sins, and washing away, by the shedding of His blood, the guilt and offence of human iniquity. The uttermost humiliation of the morrow is here exhibited in a symbolical act.

2. But we must look more particularly at some of the specific points of this exhibition.

It was a voluntary service, rendered in the consciousness of divine power. St John emphatically tells us that the Lord knew that *He came from*

God and went to God, and that all things were given into His hands by the Father ; in that night of the shadow of redeeming death He was fully conscious, in the mystery of His divine-human person, that He was Lord of all by eternal prerogative, and already invested with all power as mediator in anticipation of His death. This the evangelist tells us, not only that we may feel the more His infinite condescension, but also that we may not mistake the entirely spontaneous, voluntary character of His submission, and the predetermined certainty of His redeeming act. He was the servant of God and the minister of man ; but the ransom of His life He himself freely gave. His assumption of our lot was perfectly voluntary. Delivered to be crucified by man, and delivered up for our offences by God, He himself was the first agent in His surrender to death. He had power to lay down His life, and power to take it again ; and, though this was the commandment received of the Father, it was also the free impulse of the love with which He loved us to the end. Had it not been so, His death could not have been redemption.

Again, it was as our Lord that He bought us with His blood. Most carefully does He here, as everywhere, reserve the inalienable rights of His dignity. *Ye call me Master and Lord ; and ye say well, for so I am :* it was our God who redeemed us in the likeness of sinful flesh. While He *suffered for sin* as man, He *condemned sin in the flesh* as God. The submission to death was a divine

victory over the cause of death. Having poured out His soul as an atonement, He became our redeeming Lord, adding a new element to His eternal dominion over us. But the race was already His when He redeemed it, and He redeemed it as its God made man. He *came to His own* when He came as our Deliverer; His victory over our enemies, and over sin their centre and head, was the victory of One who would not suffer Himself to be despoiled of the creature He had formed in His own image and for His own glory. The expedient that reconciled His primitive and His acquired right is the mystery of atoning redemption.

But we mark a most necessary qualification here. The redeeming act of Christ is fully available only for *His own*, the individuals who, in their countless numbers, make up His ransomed possession. The symbol of the footwashing did indeed teach generally that Christ washed away the sins of the race. He made atonement for man as man: for every man, alike the Johns and the Judases of mankind. So effectual has been that washing, that no one is condemned eternally for the stain that he brought into the world, or for the defilement that contact with our world occasioned. Christian baptism is only the seal and the pledge, at the threshold of life, of a christian grace into which we all are born. But, as we look at our Great Servant going round with the basin and washing each one, and saying, *Ye are clean, but not all*; when we hear Him telling Simon that, unless washed by his own consent, he

had no fellowship with his Master, we cannot but perceive that there is an awful sense in which Christ may wash man in vain, or man may refuse the benefit of this heavenly washing. There is a proportion—small, fain would we hope, in comparison of the innumerable multitude washed in the blood of the Lamb, as Judas in comparison of the eleven—for whom the condescension of Christ has been shown in vain. The saved are personally saved. Whatever benefits and blessings our Eternal Minister has brought to man, none have fellowship with Him in either regeneration, none shall enter His everlasting fellowship, whose souls have not been cleansed from all defilement by the virtue of His blood, preached in the word which is the seed of the new life, and applied to the conscience and heart by the Spirit of holiness.

II. Hence we proceed to consider the footwashing as illustrative of the individual believer's fellowship with Christ.

How our Lord would have taught the lesson in word which He taught in act we scarcely now know. Simon Peter interrupted Him. When he saw the beginning of his Master's preparations, unlike anything he had ever seen before, he was amazed. But, when Jesus approached himself, he felt and yielded to the recoil of his utter unworthiness. Like John the Baptist, who, after having baptized with sublime composure men of all classes, when One above all came, bowed his head, let his

dignity sink, and was abashed ; so here the first apostle is confounded by his Master's act, *Comest thou thus to me?* And as, once before, the Lord's too near approach had revealed to him all the sinfulness of his soul, and he cried, *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,* so here also he unwittingly, not knowing what he said, would put from him his greatest good. When he asked, *Dost thou wash my feet?* the Lord replied that the meaning of His act would be afterwards explained, partly by Himself, more fully by the Spirit. Then the son of Jonas flashed out again: *Thou shalt never wash my feet.* Thus enforced, the condescension of his Master, which could not fail this night, told him what was His deeper meaning: that He thereby signified the washing away of His people's sins, and the purification of their nature, as the sole bond of fellowship between Him and them. Then Simon Peter, to the last in gentle controversy with his Master's grace, sprang to the opposite extreme: If this be so, then *not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.* Thus was enforced the second lesson, that, after the great regeneration, there remains only the gradual sanctification unto perfect holiness.

1. Our Minister in heaven makes provision for the forgiveness of our sins and the renewal of our nature. When He came to visit us in great humility, He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to *give His life a ransom for many.* He is gone into the heavens, still not so much to

be ministered unto as to minister, and to give His Spirit for His people's redemption. That redemption extends to all the need of the soul as guilty and under the power of sin. Hence the Lord's significant change of the term : *If I wash thee not*, not the feet only, but *thee*, in the integrity of the spiritual nature. His heavenly washing is the forgiveness of sins, *the sprinkling of the heart*, which is the man himself, *from an evil conscience*; the blotting out of his sin from the record of the book of remembrance, and the pacification of his troubled spirit by the assurance of mercy. It is the pleading of the virtue of the atonement on his behalf which causes his faith to be reckoned for righteousness, and makes him accepted in the Beloved, the guilt and vileness of his past life being no more remembered against him. And, while through this washing he is justified freely, and regarded as righteous, his sin being no more seen though the fact of his having sinned remains, his nature is also cleansed through the bestowment of the renewing Spirit, whose emblem is the laver of regeneration. Thus the two washings, distinguished clearly as acts, are united in their effect. He who came *by water and by blood* makes both symbols one in the salvation of every man who hath *part in Him*. According to St John's own later language, summing up in one deep sentence, once uttered, the whole mystery of our acceptance, *He washes us from our sins in His own blood*. Those who are His now, and His eternally, have no spot that justice can mark, for

they are justified and forgiven; but they could not be His unless purified unto Himself from their defilement, and changed into His own image through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.

2. That other lesson, which Simon Peter, as it were, prematurely extorted, is of the utmost importance in relation to the Christian life and our Saviour's ministry in heaven. It conveys to us His pledge that He will make provision for the washing away of that defilement which may be daily contracted by a renewed believer through the contact of his nature, not yet fully delivered from the principle of sin, with an evil world. *He that is washed needeth not to wash save his feet.* These words might seem to indicate that while the great regeneration is the Lord's own act, the daily renewal rests rather with His servants' diligence. But it is not so: *needeth not to wash* means, when interpreted by the Saviour's act and His subsequent word, *needeth not to be washed save his feet.* The full virtue of the everlasting atonement, and the full energy of the Divine Spirit, are required to keep the saint in a justified and sanctified state; and both are here pledged by our heavenly Minister. *The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.* It is a fountain opened that flows for ever over the penitent and believing soul, removing the guilt and stain of the evil that remains in the christian still walking in an evil world, from the slightest infirmity that makes

him unworthy up to actual and even wilful sin committed, repented of, renounced, and confessed at the throne of grace : all sin, in short, that is not cherished, retained, made his own, and established into habit again. It is the pledge of daily and hourly grace, for daily and hourly danger ; the promise of effectual preservation from the corrupting influences of the world, the risings of the flesh, and the temptations of the devil. It is the ever-blessed assurance that we shall be *preserved in Christ Jesus*, and be always *accepted in the Beloved.*

Two opposite perversions of this gracious word must here be guarded against.

It gives us the perfect ideal of the christian life ; but it may be so exhibited as to throw many, who are conscious of not having realised it, into despondency. Among our Lord's last statements of the nature of His religion, before He taught it by the ministry of His apostles, it sets up a lofty standard, and one that is in strange variance with the life of too many who call Him Lord. It seems to proclaim one great washing at the outset never to be repeated ; the remainder of christian probation being the daily renewal unto holiness, a constant and progressive sanctification unto the end. Nor dare we abate our Lord's requirement, or change in the spirit of concession to human weakness the ordinance that He has given for the regulation of His servants' hopes and aims. *Let Him be true*, whatever our sad confessions may be.

But, on the other hand, we must never forget that mercy, compassion, and love evermore interpret the Saviour's laws to those who do not abuse them unto licentiousness. We cannot determine what degree of sin against the Spirit of regeneration avails to undo effectually and to the uttermost His converting work. We know that He may be resisted as the Spirit that prompts to good, grieved as the sealing Spirit of holiness, quenched as the Spirit of holy aspiration, tempted as the Spirit of providence, and yet not forsake the work of His own hands. To return from the Holy Ghost to our Lord, we know that He was to these disciples a long-suffering Master. After these words were spoken, He still solicited what was not yet utterly dead in Judas' heart, and washed away from Simon Peter a very great offence. He knows the secrets of all hearts, and may discern a better life not yet quite extinct where none but He could discern it: while all are mourning over the semblance of death, He may say *He is not dead but sleepeth*. But, granted that the case—your case—any man's case—may seem utterly desperate; and a new conversion, a new regeneration, may seem too surely needful. There is nothing in the Lord's declaration that renders even that hopeless. He only describes the normal and perfect idea of the christian life, attained by many. He does not say more than that he who is once washed needeth not that washing again. He does not go on to say, *Nor shall he who has lost his first washing ever*

be washed anew. A man cannot enter again into his mother's womb and be born; but natural analogies sometimes halt in their application to spiritual mysteries. Our heavenly minister fainteth not, neither is weary; it is hard for man to exhaust the resources of His grace. It was *in the bowels of the Lord Jesus* that St Paul *travailed in birth again* for the dead Galatians, his *little children* only in memory of what they had been. Then let us not press our Lord's words to His people's despair. While they set before us a standard which they are thrice blessed who attain, they do not warrant the hard sayings of many of their interpreters who would give up the backslider who has sinned away his early grace to *uncovenanted mercies*, of which the Redeemer knows nothing.

On the other hand, we must be equally careful not to interpret this saying in the interests of a nature only too tolerant of evil. It is possible to press it, consciously or unconsciously, into a service the direct opposite of its intention. Depending upon the inexhaustible patience of our heavenly minister, how many have neglected to wash themselves and made Christ the *minister of sin*! The most frightful form of this perversion has its theory, maintained theologically, and too often practically confirmed, that those whom Christ has once washed He will and He must, by the necessity of His covenant, wash to the end, let their defilement be ever so wilfully contracted and persistently retained. *God forbid!* cried St Paul,

with an emphasis of holy wrath that we do well to echo. And we know Simon Peter's own comment, speaking in his second epistle of this very thing : *It is happened to them according to the true proverb.* But there is a more mitigated and more subtle, but almost equally dangerous, form of the same abuse, that of those who are indolent in seeking deliverance from their besetments, because they know by experience the long-suffering of the Lord. They forget the terrible denunciation uttered upon those who *sin that grace may abound* : they are insensible to the affecting plea which the very patience of Christ's daily washing urges upon every generous heart ; they do not feel the solemn emphasis of those other words, which combine warning and promise in one, *If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me* ; and they most effectually hinder the gentle operation of that grace which would, if their own diligence heartily co-operated with it, bring them to the consummation of our Saviour's desire for them, and their own privilege in Him, to be *every whit whole*.

III. Finally, our Lord furnishes His own express interpretation of the feetwashing, when He says, *I, your Master and Lord, have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.* This one act was chosen to combine all these purposes : the former, which have been dwelt upon, were better to be understood after the Sacrifice of the morrow ; this last He at once explained. He

leaves to His disciples a pattern of self-sacrifice, which in its spirit and in its act their life must imitate. The entire manifestation of Jesus in the flesh was the perfect expression of self-sacrifice for the good of man. This He had taught and exemplified in every act of His life. He was about to give it an infinite illustration on His cross; and now, at the end of life, and on the eve of His death, He seals the lesson in the most impressive manner on His people's hearts.

1. The mind of Christ in His self-renunciation for man is the standard of the true Christian spirit. Between us and Him, between Him the pattern and us the imitators, there is infinite disparity; and in some respects essential difference. Much in His mediatorial submission is for ever beyond our reach; we contemplate, adore, and rejoice. But as to the *spirit* of His sacrifice on the cross—that great example of which the footwashing was the lesser type—of that we are all commanded to be partakers. This was the solitary principle in Himself which He ever proposed to us for our imitation. And whenever His apostles propound His example—notably St Peter—this is the aspect of His character that they exhibit. And it is imitated by those who humble themselves, not for the sake of humility itself, but for the good of others; who entirely surrender self, as the object of life and guide of action, and find it where Christ found it, in the service of God and man. *I must be about my Father's business, at the beginning*

of His life, has this echo at the end, *The Son of man is come, not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many.* To know no self apart from the will of God and the service of man is Christ's example and the perfection of the christian spirit.

2. In some sense, also, He gives us here the pattern of our act as well as of our spirit. The spirit of His self-sacrifice gave Him to our race; and His service has left no ministry incomplete, whether to our bodies or to our souls. Leaving us an example for our imitation in act as well as in principle, He chose an emblem that was well adapted to illustrate those deeds of benevolence which minister to our brethren's needs of every kind. It was one which in its very nature showed that it was not a literal imitation that the Lord required. In some instances necessary and laudable, the washing of our brethren's feet is not a duty of general obligation. But, standing as the symbol of all the innumerable services that humble charity may render, it is binding upon all. And so long as *we have His poor with us*—a legacy which the Lord has left like His peace for ever—we need never miss the application of His sacred example. We copy this great Minister when we do all that in us lies, each in his sphere, and without effacing the distinction between high and low, to succour the distressed, to feed the hungry, and serve the Head in His members, who are His feet, upon earth. Nor is the example limited to bodily ministrations.

We may be the humble imitators of our great pattern in His service to the souls of men ; we also must be girded about with the napkin, and bear with us the basin of charity, and do what in us lies to wash away our brethren's offences. And what we cannot do ourselves, we may do as the instruments of His grace ; seeking to carry out His infinite designs in ten thousand lesser ministries of spiritual charity, that reflect upon earth His infinite grace in heaven.

The Lord closes the scene by a warning and a benediction.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. This is a gentle method of uttering—not so much to the apostles, whose faith and charity failed not, as to us—the most solemn admonition. Applicable to all the sayings of His life, to all the enforcements of our duty, it is peculiarly applicable to this one. It bids us take care that we do not mistake the true character of the christian life ; it is no other than the selfrenouncing imitation of the christian pattern. We cannot but connect with it those other words : *Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say ?* He has left us in no doubt what will be the final test of the genuineness of our service to Him as our Lord, and of our faith in Him as our Saviour ; the deeds and offices of selfrenouncing charity done in His name, in His strength, and to His people for His sake. And, after having most solemnly predicted what the question of the great day will be, He here gives us His most striking

example to confirm His words and keep them for ever in our minds.

And He seals all with His benediction: *Blessed are ye if ye do them!* There is a peculiar blessing in this imitation that is derived from no other source. We go back to the beginning of His ministry, and hear His opening benedictions. They rested mainly on personal characteristics, and dispositions of the heart; but one of them, the central one, rested on *the merciful*. This He takes up, and makes it the last benediction. This blessing He *leaves with us*, and the same blessing He will *give us* finally and for ever, at that great day, if we are found among the number of those who knowing these things have done them.

VI.

THE HOUR OF REDEMPTION.

JOHN XII. 23.

And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.

IT was given to St John, long after the other evangelists had described the passion, to add some details of the deepest interest. Not, indeed, that he has anything to impart known only to himself. He was not admitted to any communion with the depths of the Saviour's emotions which was denied to his brethren ; and the mysteries which he was one of the three who witnessed are precisely those that he has passed by unmentioned. The Transfiguration and Gethsemane are not in his record. Nor does he ever assume to interpret from the depths of his own contemplation what the others had not explained. Like them, he only testifies that which he saw and heard ; never presuming to utter a single word of his own comment. The long and

precious supplements that he has given embrace events and conversations preceding the atonement, witnessed and heard by the whole company of the disciples, but reserved for his narrative. And he narrates all without interpreting.

The Transfiguration and Gethsemane—the two most awful experiences he had ever known—St John omits. But the scene and the discourse which he here records unite the significance of the Mount and the Garden in one. Within the precincts of the temple, as we may presume,—though the place and occasion are left indefinite,—the Lord passed through a season of most profound agitation, the earnest of the Garden ; but out of the very midst of the darkness that fell upon His soul, light unspeakable arose, the reflection of the Mount. And it is the exhibition of His mingled emotion in the prospect of His cross, as interpreted by His own words, that gives this scene its peculiar interest to him who studies St John's testimony.

The blending of these opposite emotions is the key to the whole. Let us behold it, first, in relation to the coming hour, an hour of darkness in which His own name and the Father's is glorified ; then to the lifting up of Christ on the cross, which is the casting out of Satan as the prince of this world ; and, lastly, to the perfection of His self-sacrifice in death, which is the seed of much fruit, the life of endless multitudes. Here there is a climax of three gradations,—the hour of the

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passion, the crucifixion, the sacrifice ; and with these correspond three triumphant results,—the display of the divine glory, victory over the enemy, and the salvation of the church. St John records the words, but the hour itself explained them, and the Holy Spirit interprets them to His believing people.

I. The Lord enters into the darkness of His hour, and proclaims its glory.

The hour is the sacred term that marks the passion as the goal and consummation of the Redeemer's atoning work. *The things concerning me have an end*, He elsewhere said ; this was their end, the crisis of redeeming sorrow to which all the cycles of expectation converged. And He himself announces, in the hearing of the people first, then in the secret fellowship of His disciples, that it had come. He entered the world in the *fulness of time*; He wrought His preparatory work in the *days* of the Son of man ; and now, after the ages of waiting had passed into days of fulfilment, the days are compressed into an *hour*. This hour had been from the beginning in His thoughts ; often it had passed His lips, so that the word became familiar to His followers ; but now He welcomes it as come. From this moment, all is sacred to suffering ; the shadow of the cross rests upon every scene and throws its sacred gloom upon every incident and every word. The passion has begun.

We hear the Redeemer's testimony to the depth

of the agony that began to trouble His soul, and which from that moment went on, sorrow upon sorrow, in all its everdeepening variety of grief, through the indignities of His enemies, the abandonment of His friends, the inward sense of the world's guilt, to the full endurance of the sentence upon transgression, and that infinite woe which took from man his curse. His words are few, and have not yet reached the boundless desolation of Gethsemane ; but they already disclose a sorrow and a struggle that we can only watch *a great way off*, and the depths of which are past finding out. It was the first more direct onset since the temptation of the spirits of evil : *this is your hour and the power of darkness*. It was the beginning of the awful strain upon the resources of His lower nature under which He would fain cry, *Father, save me from this hour*, but that He knows *for this purpose He came to this hour* ; the same pressure which afterwards in the garden caused Him for one moment to ask that the *cup might pass*, a prayer that in the next moment He recalled in the submission of perfect victory, *not my will but Thine be done*. These were in very deed *the days of His flesh* when He poured out His strong crying and tears. We hear but little of these appeals of the suffering Son, but we know that He was *heard in that He feared*, and that light arose to Him out of the darkness.

The darkness is not past, but the true light already shines ; and the Redeemer's tribute to the

oppression of His hour is full of confidence and joy. His first word on entering the dark valley is, *The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified.* In the accomplishment of the great purpose of His being, and the pouring out of His soul unto death, He anticipates His own glory : not only the honour that should redound to Him in His exaltation to the throne of mediatorial dominion, but the glorification of Himself the incarnate Son of God, through the manifestation of His divine perfections in His sacrificial death. His lowest humiliation was His highest dignity. Shining forth in His ascension, and acknowledged by the universe in heavenly exaltation, to Himself His death was His most supreme glory : the hour of a triumph of selfsacrificing love that none but the eternal God in human nature could display. The cross in which His servants gloried He here glories in Himself. And in it He beholds the glorification of His Father's attributes : the display of the divine perfections in such an exhibition and in such an harmony as had no parallel. *Father, glorify Thy name !* was His final submission, as the incarnate Son, to the propitiatory sufferings of the cross, which exhibited at once the glory of the divine justice, visiting upon sin its penalty, and the glory of the divine mercy, providing salvation for the sinner : that expedient of infinite wisdom in which all the perfections of the divine name shine in their several and united lustre, and all the divine attributes blend into one righteousness,

with love as their *bond of perfectness*. To this the Redeemer's final *Lo ! I come* there is a sublime response from heaven. A third time in His course of humiliation the Father proclaims aloud the secret of His constant complacency in the sacrifice of His Son : *I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it again*. The voice from above declares that in the whole course of the Saviour's word and work the divine name had been magnified among men; and that the consummation of His mediatorial obedience would magnify it still more abundantly. Although the people who stood by heard not these words, He to whom they were spoken revealed them to His apostles, and they have reached our ears : the final testimony to our Representative and Redeemer, that in Him, and in the whole of His life and obedience unto death, His Father and our God was well pleased.

The record, however, is transmitted to us that we may learn to adjust to it all our thoughts concerning the mystery of the atoning mediation of our Lord. The mystery itself we cannot understand. During the hour of our actual redemption, the cross was shrouded in darkness : its excess of glory is as darkness as well to the reverent contemplation as to the rash speculation of mortals. But this preliminary scene at least teaches us two errors that we must avoid. It tells us that we must not by our feeble theories mitigate the sorrow that wrought our redemption ; that we must not mingle the cup that the Redeemer drank with ingredients of our

own choosing ; that we must not exchange the sorrows that rendered satisfaction to justice, bowed down the holy sufferer unto death, pressed the drops of blood from His heart before it was pierced, and wrung from Him that exceeding bitter cry on the cross, into a mere demonstration of such charity, sympathy, and selfsacrifice unto death as man might rival, and could never redeem man's soul. But it tells us also what it is equally important for us to remember, that the atoning Redeemer was filled with the consciousness of His own glory and His Father's complacency, even while He felt the anguish that our sins, made His own, inflicted upon His holy Spirit ; that He went to the cross, as sent thither by His Father's mercy, and drawn by His own love to the human race ; that He presented Himself as an oblation for man's sin, not that He might propitiate a justice otherwise inexorable, but to manifest the love that provided the propitiation, and to declare the glory of the divine name in the harmony of its perfections ; that, in short, He went forward to His cross that He might consummate a sacrifice that had been appointed in the counsels of God before the world was, that was virtually perfect before He died, and on the ground of which the world had been governed as a redeemed world from the beginning.

II. From the hour of the passion to the lifting up on the cross the transition is obvious ; and here also we perceive the same blending of opposite

emotions that we have already witnessed. By the rejection to which He now looked forward as about to be carried to its extremest point, the great enemy would be cast out and men be drawn to Himself. The hour of His own uttermost humiliation would be the hour of His eternal victory.

St John has already made us familiar with this expression ; one chosen by the Holy Ghost to serve the double purpose of signifying both the crucifixion and the exaltation of our Lord. After the darkness was rolled from the cross, and the right hand of God had been stretched forth to translate His Son to heaven, the term is consecrated to import His supreme dignity. But in the gospels, and by this evangelist especially, it is used to express the act of man that lifted Jesus to His cross. And it is observable that the Lord himself and no other uses it. In the beginning of His ministry he spoke to Nicodemus of the serpent in the wilderness that was the type of Himself, lifted up for the salvation of the world ; but He forebore then to say by whose hands. In the middle of His career He plainly told the Jews, at that time His avowed enemies, that they would thus reject Him : *When ye have lifted up the Son of man.* And now at the close, when the hands of wicked men were ready to execute this act of finished wickedness, He once more, and for the last time, declares by what death he should die : *I, if I be lifted up !* Here only does the evangelist comment on his master's words ; lest we should lose the full

significance of the saying, and suppose that the exaltation to heaven was meant, he expressly tells us that the Lord thereby foreannounced His cross.

And it is of the cross as the symbol of His own reproach that He speaks ; not as the high altar on which the all-availing sacrifice was offered, not as the emblem of His church's rejoicing, not as the scene of the display of His own incarnate glory ; but as the tree on which sinners crucified Him whom they rejected. *He endured the cross, despising the shame.* But the shame which He despised for the joy that was set before Him was nevertheless shame. He knew that on the cross He would be uplifted by human hands as unworthy to live ; that the Gentiles would deliver Him to the most ignominious death for the crime of blasphemy, alleged against Him by His own people ; and thus that the whole world in its representatives—the *princes of this world*—would crucify Him, the Lord of glory, as accounting Him unworthy to live on earth, and smitten of God in heaven. And He also knew that He would be, in the most awful sense, *smitten of God* ; that His Father also *would deliver Him up* for our offences, and that He must for a season, before angels and men, endure that humiliation for the expression of which we must take refuge in the words of holy writ, *Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.* All this was in His perturbed thoughts when He cried, *Now is my soul troubled.*

But while His *soul* is troubled—and only in His

deepest anguish does He ever mention His *soul*—Jesus still *rejoiceth in spirit*. On either side of the word concerning the cross there is a word of triumph—on the one side, *the prince of this world is cast out*, and on the other, *I will draw all men unto me*; the lifting up between the two explains and connects these two great sayings. This world and its prince are regarded as one; and upon Satan, with all his works and all his agents, and all his subjects, the redeeming death of the cross pronounces a sentence that will be finally and for ever executed in their eternal banishment from God. But the emphasis lies upon the *prince of this world*. This name is given to him, not because of any rightful authority that he has—for he could have no power unless it were given him by human submission and sin—but as the usurper who, since the first temptation, has ruled over the darkness of this world, and drawn, alas! more than the third part of the children of men into his kingdom of evil. His actual authority and sway upon earth, taught everywhere in scripture, is here acknowledged by our Lord in an emphatic expression which here stands alone; but it is acknowledged only that its doom and end may be announced. He had, at an earlier time and in a higher sphere, *beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven*. Now He beholds, as the result of His redeeming death, delivering man from the bondage of sin, through an atoning sacrifice and a renewing Spirit, Satan fall from his power on

earth. Not, indeed, with the swiftness of lightning, but absolutely and surely, the enemy is to be cast out of his power, driven from the seats of his dominion in the world, and, though he may for ages shoot his retreating arrows, finally and for ever dispossessed of the human race. But this was only part of our Saviour's triumphant vision. *I will draw all men unto me* expresses the tranquil assurance of His own soul, and His prophecy to His people, that the virtue of His death—of that *kind of death* that He was to die—would draw in due time, when preached in His word and testified by His spirit, all the children of men to Himself. He foresaw the endless procession of souls attracted to His cross, as these Greeks were attracted to His person, out of every nation under heaven; *drawn* by the mighty power of His atoning sacrifice, and yielding to that influence in multitudes sufficient to be His satisfaction after the *travail of His soul*.

Here also we have much that may be profitably pondered as the preface to our meditations on the Saviour's passion. Here also there are two lessons that guard our thoughts. On the one hand, we are most emphatically reminded of the reality of Satan's relations to our sin and the world's redemption. Amongst those who style themselves modern thinkers, a doctrine of the atonement finds much acceptance, which rejects the personality of the being to whom our Lord here most solemnly alludes, and would interpret every re-

ference to him and his influence as mere symbol, or accommodation to Jewish habits of thought. But in doing so they must reconstruct the entire doctrine of the new testament, not without wresting the Saviour's words to their own great peril. Throughout the history of redemption, the presence of the adversary is most plainly seen ; a shadow, a voice, a person, a tempter, an accuser, a ruler, a prince. Nor can we cast him out of new-testament theology without deranging, if not undermining, the whole economy of redemption. He was not indeed the god of this world who had its kingdom at his disposal : that was only his own vain boast. He was not the accuser, whom the satisfaction of Christ's death cast out of the court, or the feudal superior of man to whom that ransom price was paid : these have been the theories imposed by a fanciful theology on scripture. But he was the prince and representative of the sin of the world, and the ruler of its wickedness ; he is the being whose power, and that of sin, the law of his kingdom, is broken ; he is the head of the spiritual wickedness in high places, who, with all that resist the drawing of the Saviour, will be cast out for ever from the presence of God. On the other hand, we are taught that through our redemption we are delivered from the reign of sin in the flesh ; that the might of evil among men is broken ; that the drawing of Christ is as universal in its influence as the virtue of His atonement ; that we may enter into our Master's joy and exult over a vanquished

enemy, whom we may resist with the full assurance that he will flee from us, and whom we may defy and renounce in the strength of our Master with as much confidence as if, like his own idols, he were *nothing in the world.*

III. Lastly, we pass from the hour, through the lifting up, to the selfsacrificing death which gives life to many multitudes. The words which express this blessed combination of opposites were uttered among the first on this occasion, but they are the last in their full significance. And they also interpret two contending emotions in the soul of the Redeemer, now ready to be offered.

Before He speaks of being lifted up, He uses a figure that expresses, not the reproach and ignominy of His rejection, but the perfect selfoblation of His death as endured for the life of others. It is His vicarious sacrifice that is here in His thoughts; and it now takes the first place for the same reason that it is made more prominent than any other aspect of His death throughout His teaching—because it brings Him into most direct relation with the souls that His love would benefit. If we trace His own allusions to the coming end in all the evangelists we shall find that they for the most part connect His own suffering with the joy of His redeemed, His own loss with their gain, His own submission to evil with their redemption from it, His own death with their life. So it is to the very last. But here, during the first hours of

the week of redemption, He chooses the most affecting of all the emblems that He ever employed ; not indeed the most affecting as touching on His own griefs—these had their full utterance afterwards—but as expressive of the entireness of His surrender to death, and the absolute connexion between His death and the abundant life of His people. The natural emblem fails, if taken alone ; the corn of wheat has no selfsacrificing love, it dies and yet does not die, reappearing in the full ears that rise from it but not reappearing itself. When, however, it is added to the other impressive similitudes that our Lord has used, it contributes its own most touching meaning to the rest.

And what in this similitude expresses the deep anguish of this prelude to Gethsemane? The Lord does not answer that question, nor does the evangelist supply the deficiency. It may be that no answer can be given that mortal mind could understand. This only we know, that the incarnate Redeemer, in these the *days of His flesh*, felt in all its purity and force the recoil of life from dissolution that belongs to human nature, even while He knew that the bands of death should never hold Him. But death came not to Him after the common visitation of man, nor was His only the death of exquisite physical agony. There was a mystery in the anguish of His soul when the enemy confronted Him that nothing in the secret of human dying will account for. He died as He had lived, under the burden of the infinite sin of

mankind. It pressed upon His heart, and marred His countenance, and chastised His soul, and made it exceeding sorrowful, *even unto death*. No created being will ever know the agony that separated the soul and body of the Lamb of God. Its profoundest secret He never mentioned. The distant prophets dwell on it with awe; the apostles sometimes approach it reverently; He himself, as here, leaves it unuttered.

But the rejoicing of His Spirit keeps not silence. He does not say that He will surrender His whole being to loss and infinite sacrifice, and sorrow, for the good of man; but passes immediately to the much fruit that would grow from His death, the example that He would set to His saints, and the supreme honour which He and His imitators in the selfrenouncing charity of holiness would partake together throughout eternity. The strain of rejoicing runs through the whole, as inspired by the view of the unnumbered multitudes, past all but divine computation, who would owe to His selfrenunciation unto death their ransom from sin and hell, and participation with Himself in the bliss of heaven. *I am come*, He had once said, *that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*. According to the exceeding greatness of His dying woe, and the abundance of the death He died is, and will ever be, the greatness and the abundance of the life of His saints. Nor is the Saviour's rejoicing marred by the prospect that His death will not give life to all man-

kind. *Much fruit* is the Saviour's recompense and satisfaction. And what are we that we should be discontented, when our Master *sees of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied!*

The only word of exhortation that we hear in this most solemn hour is that which here arises; and with it we may close. *If any man serve me, let him follow me:* this is the voice of Him who passes through the garden to the cross. There is no loyalty to the Redeeming ruler of mankind and king of saints which does not share His passion. For Him we must sacrifice our sins; with Him our evil nature must be crucified; and in the imitation of His last example we must live, and, if needs be, die for the good of others. *And where I am, there also shall my servant be:* for a short season in the gloom of temptation and sorrow and conflict, but for ever and ever in the fellowship of His glory. *If any man serve me, him will my Father honour:* this He said, signifying to what a glorious inheritance He would Himself pass through the suffering of death, and that His faithful servants, every one of them, should partake of that glory with Him: *heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ.* Let this be our lesson whensoever we approach the cross. Let us also, in our humble fellowship with our Lord, unite the garden and the mount in our own experience; and, passing through our hour of lesser sorrow, hold fast our confidence stedfast to the end, that we shall be made *partakers with Christ,* and share His glory.

VII.

THE PERFECT OBEDIENCE.

LUKE II. 49.

*And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me ?
wist ye not that I must be about my Father's
business ?*

JOHN IV. 34 ; IX. 4.

*Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of
Him that sent me, and to finish His work.—I
must work the works of Him that sent me, while
it is day ; the night cometh, when no man can
work.*

JOHN XVII. 4.

*I have glorified Thee on the earth : I have finished
the work which Thou gavest me to do.*

IN His last sacrificial prayer our Lord presents Himself to the Father with the earnest of His heavenly intercession. Although the cross is still between Him and His glorious future, He speaks of His own person and of His work as if the

heavens had already received Him. He looks forward to the accomplishment of His mediatorial designs with an anticipation that brings the things that shall be into the present; and looks backwards upon the whole part of His course, from eternity into time, and from time into eternity again, as if the things concerning Him had already reached their end. The now which enters with such solemn emphasis into this priestly prayer unites in itself all the past and all the future.

The words of our Lord's appeal—*I have finished the work*—instantly remind us of former occasions when the same terms were used. Twice during the burden and heat of His day we hear them: once when He looked upon the blind man, and said, *I must work the works of Him that sent me* before the night cometh; and once when He contemplated the coming of the first-fruits of Samaria, and forgot both the woman's water-pot and the food brought Him by His disciples: *My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work*. And thence we go back to the early morning, when as yet the labour and the sorrow of His career were in the distance; and at the outset of His life we hear Him say to Mary and to us, *Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?* Inverting the order of the sayings, we have before us the three stages of the supreme consecration of the Son of man; the successive steps of the process and consummation of the most perfect life, the only perfect life, that was ever lived out

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upon earth : the beginning, progress, and end of the finished obedience that led to His eternal dominion.

I. The beginning of our Saviour's testimony to Himself as the incarnate servant of His Father's will was in the temple, when He went up to His first passover. And the earliest words which have been preserved for us, His first official words, were *I must be about my Father's business.*

The circumstances which form the framework of this saying are full of manifold interest ; but we must select only those which serve to illustrate its significance as uttering the law of the mediatorial life. Jesus was taken up to the temple as a child of the covenant who had reached the age when childhood passed into youth, and responsibility began ; when, according to the maxim in Israel, He became a *son of the law.* There He kept His first passover ; and spent a paschal week, concerning the solemnities and revelations of which all but perfect silence is kept. The evangelist whose privilege it was to give the church this one brief glimpse of the child growing up into the Christ says but little that might stimulate or gratify curiosity. He lifts the veil for one brief moment to discover to us the form that is otherwise lost to us for nearly thirty years ; but gives no intimation that might mark it as a crisis in the development of this heavenly student of the Father's will. We know that He *grew in wisdom as in stature,*

and we are told that He asked and answered questions. But, as we muse whether now specially His human mind expanded to the perception of His divine mission, the veil falls upon the beautiful vision, and we see it no more until the day of His baptism and showing unto Israel. But as, in the history of the temptation, the forty days are passed in silence, and *afterwards* we hear the Redeemer's voice for our instruction ; so here the week is hidden from our speculation, and then come the words for which the whole is recorded. He *remains behind*: a hint the meaning of which His mother was slow to receive. She sought Him sorrowing,—the first sorrow He had given her, and earnest of the piercing of the final sword—and found Him with joy: but only to hear those clear and decisive words, *How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not—didst not thou at least know—that I must be in my Father's business?*

Although we are in quest of a larger meaning in these words, we cannot but hear in them the sacred motto and watchword of youthful consecration. Jesus, who sanctified infancy by becoming an infant, though His life was arrested before it could decline into age, here sanctifies youth by exhibiting it in all its virgin purity of devotion. That long period during which He was hidden in the divine pavilion from the strife of tongues, increasing in favour with God and man, finds no record on earth. The mystery of His nurture under the influence of the Holy Spirit, who waited not for the baptism to

descend upon this new Man, is kept among the secret things which perplex those who too curiously inquire into them. His subjection to His parents, His teaching of His true Father, His perfect study of the holy word that testified of Him and found in His understanding the first and only human spirit that ever comprehended them in all their depth and never missed their meaning, may be pondered but cannot be known. He whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us has taken one hour of inestimable price, and shown us its deep meaning as marking the sanctified transition from half-unconscious and irresponsible childhood to youth with its snares and opening sense of duty. Here is the sum of all that makes the young man's religion perfect: life begun under the solemn sense of duty to God, stern dedication to an absolute law, which is perfect liberty to one who enters on it with a pardoned and renewed spirit, under the sacred sense of a necessity that nothing in earth and nothing in hell must gainsay. Jesus, on whose altogether lovely person the curtain here rises for one moment, speaks, not to His mother only, but to the whole company of the dew of His youth: *I must be in my Father's business.* Happy the young christian who makes this example the object of his glowing reverence and humble imitation. In the strength of Him who gives the motto he also may say, *I must be in my Father's house, in my Father's work.*

But when this Son of man, who was the Son of God, uttered these words, He contemplated the whole future of His ministerial service on earth. We dare not ask how perfect, down to its minutest detail, that foresight was; nor too venturously intrude into the mystery of the union between His divine omniscience and His human increasing knowledge. Had He designed that we should penetrate this secret, He would have told us. Nor must we ask what relation His present occupation in the temple bore to the sum of His Father's business. Suffice that He here declares in language, afterwards to become more definite, that His life was in His Father's hands, to be guided by His Father's counsel, and to be spent in His Father's will. In due time this half-disguised word will expand into its full force, and we shall hear Him speak of the *work given Him to do*, of the *commission received*, and of the *things heard, of the Father*. But whenever we hear it, whether here in the first utterance of the youth, or at the end in the trembling accents of the Man of sorrows, we always perceive that He speaks of His ministry as one great whole, embracing the doctrine that He came to teach, the works of typical healing He came to perform, and the obedient suffering unto death that He came to perfect for the world's redemption.

And here at the outset He assumes the full burden of the obligation that as the God-man He had undertaken. In these words we hear the

earnest of the final *I sanctify myself!* Here first He pronounces that most solemn *I must*, which means in His lips the most dread of all necessities, and at the same time the most glad consecration of voluntary devotion. *Lo, I come to do Thy will, O my God!* Having thus by anticipation yielded Himself up to the divine disposal, He retired into secret again, to be subject unto His earthly parents until the time appointed of the Father. We see Him no more for many long years, the secret of which is never invaded save by irreverent or over-curious legend. *The body prepared for Him*, which we once see in its early perfection, before sorrow and the sin of man had marred it, must grow to maturity; and then, when the second fulness of time has come, He will present Himself again to retire no more until He stands *perfect and complete in all the will of God*. Meanwhile, we know that His years will be spent in the steady contemplation of His supreme mission, and in all divine and human preparation for it, until *His hour* shall come.

II. Passing over these silent years, we approach the Redeemer once more in the middle course of His ministry, when He is bearing the burden, and weary with the heat, of His day. Twice we hear Him bearing testimony to His own fidelity in the discharge of His commission, in language that is an echo of the early pledge in the temple, and the earnest of the last redemption of it in the priestly

prayer. Both these testimonies are in the Gospel of St John, and, when united, they sum up the whole work of Christ's active ministry before He was bound and delivered up to the passive obedience of His death.

The former brings us to the well of Sychar, where the Messiah is a *Prophet in word*, preaching His gospel to the woman and to the men of Samaria. While we read the narrative, we cannot but feel that He himself, weary and hungry and thirsty in the course of His labour, is the central object. The guilty woman for whose soul He cares, and the men who flock to Him as the first-fruits of the Samaritan harvest, teach us lessons of profound importance ; but they cannot distract our attention from the Lord himself, who on this occasion delivers a most impressive testimony to His own spirit and labour. Sitting weary on Jacob's well, He waited while His disciples brought Him meat from the city ; and meanwhile preached concerning the water of life to the woman who came with her water-pot. Thirsting for her salvation, He forgot His bodily thirst. So when His disciples came with the food He much needed, they found that they were anticipated by the men of the city, who had come to Him, and to whom He declared His mission as the *Saviour of the world*. His bodily hunger was also forgotten, and, in answer to His disciples' entreaty, He replied, *I have meat to eat that ye know not of*: they could not as yet enter into the secret of His absorbing

devotion to the souls of men. The solemnity of this utterance checked any further appeal to Him ; but they questioned with themselves as to whether any of these strangers had brought Him food. Then He said unto them plainly, in words which were as much a testimony to Himself as an example to them : *My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work.* We must forbear to continue the wonderful discourse concerning the One Sower, and the many reapers : it is enough to fix our attention on the words we have quoted. They declare that as the Prophet of salvation to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles—the *Saviour of the world*, as He taught the men from the city—He had received a commission, which it was the supreme object of His life to discharge. The *minister of the circumcision* to the people of the ancient covenant, He did not forget the world beyond : the Samaritans, as midway between Jews and Gentiles, received the earnest of His future gospel. But He was specifically *sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, and to lay the foundations of His kingdom in the once Holy Land, now sanctified afresh by His presence, but in due time to be surrendered to desolation. He here bears testimony to His special vocation as the preacher to His own generation of that gospel which some would receive, many reject, and all would marvel at. This was His own *acceptable year* of ministry ; and, as He fulfilled His course, He bore witness to His own fidelity.

The latter of these two sayings takes us to Jerusalem, where the *Prophet in deed* is about to accomplish one of His most wonderful works of benevolence : type and representative of all the gracious acts of His healing. He is not now preaching His gospel, as the Saviour of the world, but putting forth the finger of His omnipotence to give a man born blind his sight. Challenged by His disciples to account for such a mystery of misery as this man presented—that is, to solve a problem that for ever baffles the mind of man—He gives as His only reply that God's darker dispensations of providence are the occasion and ground of the brighter dispensations of His grace. However past our comprehension this may be, and must be, while we are this side the veil, the Lord strengthens our faith as He strengthened that of His disciples, by showing in act that He brings the spiritual remedy for all the natural evils of mankind. Here also we must not be diverted by the unspeakable interest of the scene that followed from the Lord's second great testimony to Himself, every word of which declares His fidelity to the commission of His life and glorifies Him, while it sets the highest example before us who hear. In this case, as in the case of the testimony at Jacob's well, the tribute is indirectly drawn from Him by His disciples, but here it is varied by the consciousness of the nearer approach of the end. *I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.*

The Lord declares that as the supreme servant of God, there was to Him, as to every other minister of God's will, an allotted course of action, and a term for its performance ; that He himself, like every son of Adam, went forth to His *labour and to His work until the evening* ; and that He *must* discharge to the uttermost every obligation of His mission. As He said to one of His enemies, *I must walk to-day and to-morrow ; the third day I shall be perfected*, so here He declares that every act which He was appointed to perform as the great Prophet risen up among the people must be accomplished. Before God and man He here bears witness to His own fidelity.

It was not the Redeemer's will that we should regard these personal testimonies only in relation to Himself. As the first words in the temple give the law of consecration for all whose happiness it is to begin the day early in the morning ; so these in their combination furnish the pattern to all who are bearing the burden and heat of the day. It tells them that they also have a vocation ; that there is given them a labourers' day wherein to discharge it, and that the standard of fidelity is an absorbing devotion that finds both its sustenance and its reward in duty. He who speaks to us at the well of Sychar gives us an example of self-renouncing consecration to the will of God and the good of man that every christian, whatever be his station and opportunity, must seek to copy. To make our Father's work our meat and drink is to

be so entirely engaged in it as to find in it the satisfaction of every desire and the invigoration of our soul's daily strength. *Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*; he that doeth the commandments of God shall in this sense *live by them*. And He who speaks to us with the man born blind before Him, adds another element of solemnity to His example. He tells us of our boundless duty and of our limited day; of our multiplying obligations and of our fleeting hours; of our hours of service and the coming night. And here His words must needs find their most emphatic application in ourselves. He wrought His mightiest work in the night of death; He ceased not with His life; and to Him there was no night in the strictest sense. Of Him as of His church, it is true that the *night was past, the day is at hand*. But we as individuals have our duty assigned, and a night of rest when cometh the judgment: of us it holds good that the *day is far spent, the night is at hand*. And it is for us to give all diligence, that the work for which we also were sent into the world, sent rather into the new world of faith, may be done before the darkness comes when *no man can work*. The Lord's example is our strength. Speaking in the form of a servant, and as one of ourselves, He bids us redeem the time because the hours are evil, and press every faculty and energy of our being into the service of God for the *rest of our time*, while we humbly depend upon His infinite mercy

for the forgiveness of the wasted *time past of our lives.*

But, all this being true, we must not forget that the Lord bears witness to Himself. The words we have chosen are but specimens of the tone in which our Redeemer in His humility is pleased to vindicate His own honour. *Thou bearest record of thyself: thy record is not true,* was the perpetual comment of His enemies, self-convicted in their malice. But still He continued to declare His own dignity, His own purity, His own claims. Not that He bore record *alone* of Himself: He appealed also to the evidence of His Father's honour, to His forerunner's testimony, to the prophets' voices, and to the silent pleading of His adversaries' consciences. But, in the high consciousness of His own eternal truth, He counts it sufficient, while He deems it necessary, to proclaim His own perfection. Thus He testified His own pre-eminence above the ministers of God's will, while He places Himself among them, and gave assurance to His own disciples who believed in Him, and to us who believe on Him because of their words—and also because we have heard Him ourselves—that He was the eternal Son of God in His existence before the world was, and the spotless Christ after He came into the flesh. Both in the days of His controversy with His own generation, and in subsequent days of rebuke, His own deep testimonies to His dignity as God and fidelity as God man, have been approved by the demon-

stration of the Spirit to multitudes of minds and hearts. They confirm His people's faith, and they convict His enemies. For the former purpose we hear them at Jacob's well and in Jerusalem, where with peculiar emphasis our Master and pattern declares His perfect fidelity to the commission received of the Father.

III. Let us now reverently approach the Saviour amidst the solemnities of His last prayer of consecration to the cross : not, however, to meditate on the prayer itself, but simply to hear and mark how He recalls the words with which He has already made us familiar, and declares His own fidelity to the end. I have glorified Thy name on the earth, *I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*

In its lowest and most obvious sense, this saying might seem to announce the accomplishment of the whole preparatory work of our Lord's ministry, of all that we sometimes call His active righteousness. This, of course, it must include, although He makes no distinction. He prays now as one who has left life and the world behind Him and prepares to depart. In the hearing of His disciples—and for their sakes He here prays, as well as at the grave of Lazarus—He avows that the Father's name had been glorified in His spotless obedience to the law ; in His revelations of the will of God, by doctrine and precept ; in His discharge of His functions as the Prophet of

Israel, mighty in deed and word ; and in the whole sum of His submission to the mediatorial law, under which, as the Incarnate Son, He had lived, and under which He was now prepared to die. It is, if we may so speak, the solemn surrender of His stewardship, as the minister of the circumcision, and the forerunner of His own gospel. Hence the solemnity with which He gives account of the men who had been given Him, of that circle of apostles who had been drawn to Him of the Father, and whom He had watched over, instructed, borne with, and blessed to the end. *Of all that thou hast given me I have lost none but the son of perdition.* He had received a commission as the elect servant of God ; by an infinite necessity He was faithful to it—no *must* more strong than that which ensured His fidelity ;—but here as the *Sent of the Father*, and among the last accents of His humiliation, He gives an account of His stewardship, and cries, *I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do.*

Pausing here, we may once more regard our Lord as uttering a saying which gives His servants an example to which they must strive to make the end of life aspire. His former words were uttered for our sakes, and we are loath to think that these were not. But it is with much reserve and with many qualifications that we press them into this service. No life save His ever spent upon earth could close with this unfaltering avowal. Other servants of God may through His grace have

begun their career with a pure consecration, and gone from the temple into the world under this badge, *I must be in my Father's business!* Through the might of His Holy Spirit others may say as they fulfil their course, *I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day*, surrendering their souls to the full constraint of a love that pardons the past and gives strength for the present obedience. But none can go out of the world with this high strain, *Father, I have glorified Thy name on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do.* Yet in a sense modified by grace to suit our infirmity, the servants of Christ may hope by grace to leave behind them the same dying testimony. They who live in the imitation of Christ's obedience, and who, while trusting in His finished atonement, seek the full influence of His Spirit, may hope in some humble measure to discharge their broken duty, and end their life with its great design attained. While, in death and after death, they will *look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*, they may expect to hear Him say, in the exercise of a mercy that rejoiceth against judgment, *Well done, good and faithful servants!* Though none will ever go out of time with the consciousness that they have answered all the designs for which they were sent into *the world*, we may hope as the servants of a dispensation of grace to leave life having attained the end of redemption. And for our strong encouragement our Master has left this testimony to Himself.

But now we pass beyond the sphere of human imitation. The depth of our Lord's meaning is not exhausted by saying that He declared the perfect fidelity of His life. He declares by anticipation that He had accomplished the vast design of the redeeming death. His cross was still in the future ; He was as yet only in the preparation-day of the Passover ; until now His soul had only been sorrowful *unto* death, not *in* death. *It is finished*, is the great word of the morrow. But He prays as if all things concerning Him had reached their end. He includes His *obedience unto death* in this declaration of His fidelity. *I have glorified thy name on the earth*, embraces all for which He came down from heaven, down to its last extremity ; for the words are spoken as if the earth were beneath His feet, and His blood had already been shed upon it. The glorification of God's name never means less than the full vindication of His attributes in the atoning sacrifice : the display of His righteousness in the death of the mediator, who at once satisfied the requirements of infinite justice, and demonstrated the infinite love of the divine nature towards man. In Christ's most holy person, thus made perfect in death, the perfections of the deity are displayed in their highest glory. *In the face of Jesus*, the glorified sufferer for mankind, we behold *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God*. And the Saviour here declares that already, before His actual death, the divine name was glorified, in order to leave this testimony to the theology of

His church, that His death was only the accomplishment in time of a purpose sealed in eternity, for ever settled in heaven before earth was ; that He did not enter the world to make a great experiment ; that He did not die to turn towards us the averted love of God ; but that He came as the messenger and apostle of divine compassion, whose very coming brought with it the power of our eternal redemption.

But it was only *on earth* that the work was finished. There was for Him and for His church and for the world a new beginning. And the prayer which sealed the redeeming work in its full perfection turns rather as prophecy than as prayer to the glorious future. *And now come I to Thee* brings the brightness of the ascension morning into this night of sorrows. That opened heaven which He promised to His first disciples when they came to Him, which He had always beheld as ready to receive Him when His course was run, and which more than once, rather for our sakes than for His, had been visibly manifest, now sheds its glory over the darkness of His humbled estate. The sight that afterwards strengthened His first martyr amidst these same scenes of conflict, and helped him to sleep in peace, was much more vouchsafed to this faithful Witness. But it is a light thing to say that He anticipated His victory. The actual possession of its fruits filled His soul. *Thou hast given Him power over all flesh* is the language of the redeeming servant of

God and minister of man already conscious of His sway over the destinies of the human race. Although the heavens have not received Him, He is already *the Lamb in the midst of the throne*. The incarnate person who had sometimes used the *I* and *Me* that His lower nature gave Him, now uses the *I* and *Me* of His eternal divinity. *Glorify Thou Me with the glory that I had with Thee before the world was*, is not so much the language of prayer as the language of prophetic expectation, that the glory which had been veiled in the world would now shine out again in His eternal majesty above. And all the intercessory prayers that follow are in the same strain. They are uttered on earth, but they have the strength of heaven, and are continued there. But here we must pause. While we thus gaze into heaven, listening to words that seem to leave the cross behind them, our angels—the evangelists—arouse us from our vision and remind us that this same Jesus must die before He enters into His glory. Yet, as we arise and follow Him to His cross and the last *It is finished*, we carry still in our hearts His own testimony: *Father, I have glorified Thy name on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do.*

Thus have we beheld in the light of His own words the beginning and progress and close of the life by which we live. In it we have *seen an end of all perfection*. As we have followed Him from His sacred youth through the scenes of

His painful ministry to the consummation of His obedience on the cross, He has Himself constrained us to think of Him as a servant of God. But all the time, like St John, who testifieth of these things, we have beheld His glory, *the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father full of grace and truth*. We have felt that He who thus maintained His fidelity was more than mortal. Never *man* spake like this man; never *man* lived like this man. While we read we know something of the adorable mystery of His submission as the mediatorial servant, humbling Himself that He might be exalted. And now we are assured that He is *Lord of all*. We behold Him in the mirror of His word as the *Lord of glory*; and His heavenly dignity rests in all its fulness upon every step of His earthly path. While we copy His example, we are translated into His likeness. *Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

VIII.

THE LORD OF THE DEAD AND THE LIVING.

ROMANS XIV. 7-9.

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living.

WHEN our Lord had reached the end of His redeeming work, He gathered His church around Him to hear the great announcement that He had reserved for the end: *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.* The word spoken upon the mountain in Galilee explained the whole mystery of His life upon earth, and connected it with His future reign in heaven. When He uttered that word the Lord declared that He had reached the end of His career in time, supreme dominion

over man ; and that He was about to enter upon the exercise of that dominion, its seat being transferred to heaven. Thus *All power given unto me* is the final truth of His history, the central word of scripture, and the foundation of christian truth.

So it is always regarded by St Paul, the apostle of the mediatorial scheme. These words govern his theology and impress their stamp upon his writings, although he was not on the mount to hear them. This passage is the echo of the Saviour's final saying. It is the most perfect expression which the apostolical writings contain of the Redeemer's lordship. And it is all the more impressive because it is introduced in so incidental a manner. St Paul has occasion to appeal, for the decision of a comparatively trifling case, to the sovereignty of the common Master. But, having touched this theme, his loyal soul becomes for a moment absorbed by it ; as his wont is, he turns aside to offer his most profound homage before his Redeemer's throne. He has decided the question before him by taking both the litigants before that throne, and by reminding them of their common obligation to eat or not eat, to keep the day or not keep it, *to the Lord*, with single-minded reference to His will. But he cannot leave the subject thus. *No man liveth to himself* ; that takes in the whole compass of life. *No man dieth to himself* ; that includes death and eternity. He then goes off into the contempla-

tion of Christ's boundless authority over man, in life, and in death, and for ever. The meaning of this saying is the same as that of the word upon the mount, but with an instructive variation. The Lord's dominion is the end of His mediatorial work ; our submission to that dominion is the result which He contemplated in death, which He lived again to secure, and which He makes perfect in the lives of His people.

I. The Redeemer's dominion over men is forcibly declared to have been the end of His ministry on earth. The apostle's words are very express and emphatic. *To this end that* signifies, in language as strong as could be used to note design, that the purpose of the passion was the attainment of universal dominion over the human race, in time and in eternity. To this end and no other ; for this purpose, and nothing short of it ; with this design, embracing and consummating all other designs. But we must view it under two aspects ; it was a purpose aimed at before the death ; in the resurrection it was a purpose reached. *He died* that He might have the dominion ; *He lived* that He might exercise it.

1. The death of Christ was the means to an end : the rule of a Redeemer over man.

This great intention pervades the scriptures, which testify of Him. They teach us that this was the eternal purpose of the holy Trinity : the will of the Father, written in the volume of the book

unread by man, which the eternal Son by the eternal Spirit came to do. This was the mystery hidden from the ages and generations. This was the profound meaning of the first word of promise spoken to the sad heart of man after his Fall. This was the keynote to which all the holy oracles were set. How the dominion was to be won those oracles only very gradually revealed; but the dominion itself was never kept secret. The coming Redeemer was not only the *Lamb slain*, He was also the King crowned, *from the foundation of the world*. This supremacy was the inspiration of all psalm, the goal of all prediction. When He came, the Desire of nations, it was a King that the angels worshipped, to whom men brought their gifts. And, as His kingdom had been always present to His divine mind before He became man, so it was the great idea that grew up in His human mind, and expanded with the expansion of His human thoughts. This was the *joy set before Him* at every stage of His career. His whole history bears witness to this. His miracles were wrought to testify and illustrate the deeds of His future supremacy. His teaching was based upon the doctrine of a kingdom. However humble His aspect was, He never lost the bearing of a king. As the end drew near we see that dominion over all flesh was uppermost in His thoughts. When He set His face to go to Jerusalem the silent meditation of His spirit went faster than His feet and ascended a higher mount. *Thy King cometh* was

the strain with which the dirge of the passion-week began. On the eve of His sufferings He began already to distribute His kingdoms to His followers. He entered the seven-times darkened valley with the full consciousness that He should emerge to supreme dominion, and on the very cross and in the agony of death He speaks in the spirit of a king.

But while we are taught that the Lord's dominion was the end of His coming, we are also taught that without His death the peculiar dominion that He sought could not have been reached. He might have come as the eternal Son of God incarnate, and assumed His rightful sway as Lord of all. But that supremacy must have been one of ruin or extinction to our race. Man having commenced his career under the dominion of sin must have received his Lord only as a judge, come in wrath to vindicate His Father's violated law. Then, indeed, no death but our own would have been needful; no cross would have lain in the path to such a throne as that. But the government Christ came to obtain was a government of an order unknown to man, an empire new to the universe, a rule of saving and restoring grace: it demanded that man should be first redeemed from another power, and then brought back to his first and lost estate of holy obedience and love.

The redeeming death of Christ removed every impediment out of the way of His saving government. The relation of the priestly to the kingly

office of the Saviour is simply this, that by the sacrifice of Himself He rendered it consistent with the holy justice of God that He should rule the race in mercy. His death may be said to have abolished the dominion of sin, the only power that truly holds us captive : of sin, whether viewed as entailing a curse, of which Satan is the executioner, or as an unholy power within, of which death is the consequence. He allied Himself to our nature that He might retrieve its ruin, and govern it under a constitution of grace ; all the objects contemplated in His death were subservient to that ulterior purpose, and found in it their vanishing point. On the one hand, He destroyed an alien power ; but, destroying that, He Himself reigns in its stead in an empire of saving mercy and sanctifying grace.

Sin had dominion over mankind in virtue of the penalty of a violated law. The Redeemer died to atone for sin, to absorb its sentence into Himself—*Upon Me be thy curse, O man*—and thus to release the human family from the dominion of wrath. Then, having broken the power of the curse, He reigns in the bestowment of the great blessing of pardon and peace. Sin had dominion over mankind through the law of evil ruling in his nature. By means of His atoning death the Redeemer obtained for man the gift of the Spirit of a new life, making him free from the law of sin and death, and bringing him under the control of a renewing power of unlimited strength. Sin is sometimes

represented as ruling over mankind through the power of Satan, the god of this world, the executioner of wrath, the witness against the transgressor, the advocate of the curse, the pleader for the claims of hell. Christ's redeeming death, by destroying sin that had the power of Satan, destroyed Satan's power itself, and reduced him to a vanquished and retreating and impotent enemy. Sometimes sin's dominion is represented as the power of death. By His death upon the cross, our Lord abolished the penalty resting as a doom upon the race; and in His resurrection gives us a pledge of the final removal of every vestige and trace that death had ever spoiled our nature. Thus, under whatever aspect viewed, it was sin that our Lord displaced from the throne; and, as not otherwise than through His own passion and blood He could obtain His dominion, dethrone the usurper, and reign in His stead, *He died that He might be Lord of the dead and the living.*

2. The resurrection of Christ declared that His end was attained, and that His empire was won.

He rose from death as the supreme Victor over the enemy under whom He had seemed to succumb. The human race, in His divine-human person, had rendered satisfaction for sin. Through the human nature in His sacred person the debt was paid; through the divine nature He still lived to be our Ruler. He came forth from His sepulchre the perfected Redeemer of mankind.

Hence the apostle uses the peculiar expression—peculiar in this relation—*He lived*, without the addition *He rose again*. His resurrection was the sign and proof of a life divine that had not, that could not have, been suspended. He still *prolonged His days* into the continuous and perfect exercise of all His saving functions. In His risen life, His offices were consummated and gathered into one. His mediatorial dominion is the unity of that trinity in which He is prophet, priest, and king. He who, on the shadowy side of His cross, was on His way to His own perfection, gained it in death, assured us of it in the resurrection, and displays it in the kingdom of grace. *To this end He lived as well as died—lived only in the fulness of His mediatorial life after He had died—that He might be Lord of the dead and the living.*

II. The apostle describes the administration of that dominion in terms which first express its extent as absolute over man's destiny, and then exhibit its character as accepted by His subjects and perfected in them.

1. The term which defines its extent is one not elsewhere used, and may well therefore engage our careful thought. He is the *Lord of the dead and living*. These words may be regarded as either summing up the race as a collective whole, or as distributing it into two departments.

First, they place the whole race of man under Christ's feet; and that by a designation which

sharply defines the race, under its most affecting aspect, and to the end of its history as a race.

The dead and living is a phrase which in itself gives mankind its distinct definition. The two terms of the description meet in it alone. Elsewhere the apostle shows that the dominion given to the Redeemer, and obtained by His self-sacrifice, includes the entire creation of God. He places all things that are—things in heaven, things in earth, and things under the earth,—within the scope of our Saviour's sway. All principalities and powers, whether in the light or the darkness of the universe, he brings under the shadow of Immanuel's wings. But here he limits his views to the human race as such, and gives it a denomination which it shares with no other.

The expression has a peculiar and most affecting interest. It suggests, beyond any other term, the whole sad history of our ruin and wretchedness, as it runs on from age to age, and is from age to age arrested by our Lord. The apostle might have said *mankind*, or *the seed of Adam*, or *the children of men*, to mark us off from our fellows in creation. But none of these terms magnifies the redeeming act of Christ so pathetically as this. There is no definition which so impressively and so comprehensively gives the history of our fall and recovery. We are a dying race; for ever, from generation to generation, succumbing to death, our once mortal enemy. But our Redeemer is ruling over our ruin, and translating it

into salvation. He has linked Himself with our race in all the long succession of its living and dying multitudes; and our death His government turns to life.

It is not, however, *the living and the dead*, but *the dead and living*. The dead must have the pre-eminence. All reverence to the disembodied host, for they are the bulk and body of our race, sanctified to our thought by their mystery and their multitude. Where but among the dead is the great mass of the sons and daughters of Adam! What, in comparison of the uncounted hosts, numbered only by the infinite mind, are the few hundreds of millions that at any moment are called *the living!* It is in the realm of shades that we contemplate our great family in its vastest dimensions, as it has from the first generation been gaining on the numbers of the living, and swelling onwards to the stupendous Whole bound up in the federal headship of the first and second Adam.

But when they are termed the *dead and living* it is the language of mortals that is used. The scriptures adopt our human words with a human accommodation. We speak of those who have passed away from the conditions of time, and have left their dust with us, as *the dead*; we speak of those who still breathe the breath of life as *the living*. The word of God speaks the same language. But He who is the Lord of *the dead and living* has no dead subjects. We cannot but remember His own argument with the Sadducees,—holding the

five books in their hands, but not discerning the eternal life that they testified,—Our Lord is *not the Lord of the dead but of the living*. All live to Him. There is no death in the sense of ceasing to be, no death in the sense of even unconscious existence, in all His broad dominions. The dead have passed from the law of life to man, but they are still under the law of life to Christ. There is before sinful impenitent man a death eternal; but that has another awful meaning of its own. *All live to Him*.

This expression, lastly, defines the race by a term that prescribes the limit of the Redeemer's lordship. That dominion is to be exercised as long as mankind is made up of the dead and the living: that is, until the last enemy, death, shall be destroyed, and the eternal destinies of quick and dead be decided. Then shall that which men call death, after having swallowed up so many generations, be itself swallowed up in victory; and what men call life shall be consummated, to the just in the *more abundant life* of endless blessedness, and to the unjust in the second death of everlasting misery. Then shall the Lord of the dead and living world abdicate His mediatorial throne, and *God shall be all in all*.

But, secondly, these words distribute our Lord's dominion over the two distinct provinces of *the dead* and *the living*.

He is the Lord of the world of disembodied spirits. Between His death and His resurrection He descended into hell, into the underworld, into

the vast province of human beings who had closed their probation upon earth. The moment which ended His humiliation began His glory. When His sacrifice had been offered upon the cross His sacred body was laid in the sepulchre in the keeping of death as the pledge that the penalties had been endured. But His spirit went down into that vaster sepulchre. Death yielded Him the keys which had been His from the beginning, but now became His by another right. He asked and obtained the dead for His inheritance, the uttermost parts of hades for His possession.

But here the light fails us. We dare not follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth ; ye cannot follow Me now. The effect of His entrance into that region we must not dwell upon. We may speculate as to the revelations made to the myriads who had never heard His name ; as to the confirmation of the fate of those who had died in wilful rebellion ; as to the restraints laid upon the powers of darkness ; as to the grand *all hail* which He exchanged with the faithful departed, brightening their paradise into the similitude of heaven. But the evangelical record, which faithfully follows the Lord's passion down to His final cry, suspends its story until He opens His lips to Mary after the resurrection ; and we do well to respect its silence. We must not attempt to describe His inauguration into His invisible government. Suffice to know, that the ancient empire of death lifted up its not everlasting gates, and

the Lord of glory, the Prince of life, entered in and took possession.

The same restraint is laid upon us when we would speak of the nature of Christ's dominion over the dead.

There is one province of that empire concerning which we have no definite teaching of scripture; and we must close our ears against the supplements of human theory. As to those multitudes of the dead who were left to the law written on their hearts; who, whether before or since the publication of the gospel, have died without having a Saviour preached to them by name or office; whose probation was wrought out under other conditions than those of the revealed Word; all we can say is that *Christ is their Lord*, and that is enough for those who reverently wait for the King's own fulfilment of His prophecy of the great day. There are, however, two vast provinces upon which the scripture sheds a clearer light.

The dead who have in all ages sinned against revelation, inward and outward, — who have rebelled against the gospel, however preached, — are under the power and keeping of the rejected Redeemer. They occupy one fearful province of His dominion, where they are kept against the determinate judgment of a coming day. That province is one vast prison-house, where liberty has ceased for ever, and the torment of repression and fear abides. He is their Lord; but His presence is not seen; only His restraining hand is felt. He

is their Lord and nothing more. His mercy no longer rejoiceth against judgment; His government no longer invites to repentance, no longer prescribes duty, no longer offers peace. It is a government where only the execution of penalties remains. He is *only* their Lord: no prophet, save to re-utter in their consciences unceasingly the despised burdens of His days of forbearance; no priest, save to avenge His slighted atonement and pronounce His woes instead of benediction; a King indeed He is, but a King in sore displeasure, with only a crown of thorns, whose face they will never see till they behold it once in wrath, and go out from its presence for ever. For that time they wait, *with a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation*; and their state is not hell, only because their bodies have not risen and its sorrow is not yet made perfect.

Oh fearful region of the dominion of the Son of God! Was it to obtain a rule like this that He bore His Father's wrath against sin, and despised the shame of the cross! Yes, brethren, He died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord of the rebellious dead. Thank God, we need never know the secrets of that prison-house; into that hell we never need descend!

While but little, however, is said concerning the lost in another world, the Scripture cannot keep silence concerning the blessedness of Christ's sway in paradise: paradise, only another name for heaven. There Christ not only *rules*, but *is*; and

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all who enter follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. While they rest from their labours in His service, they rest not day nor night from the tribute of adoring gratitude, or from the rejoicings of a hope which, though no longer deferred, is not yet made perfect. What their employments are we must die to know ; but we see, through the glimpses afforded by many sayings, that it is a realm of all but consummate bliss, where the Lord and His people alike wait for the perfect day. There He receives and accumulates His saints. Thither to Him go all our infants, the sparks of humanity that fly upward. There He welcomes with the kiss of peace every weary soul, and wipes sorrow from all faces for ever.

Oh blessed domain of the Redeemer's sway ! not heaven only, because heaven is the final home of the nature of man ransomed in his full integrity of body, soul, and spirit. Blessed midway realm of the happy, whose eternity is begun ; so blessed that the christian knows not what to choose,—whether to tarry till the Lord come and receive him on this earth to go thence to heaven, or to meet Him there to come back with Him.

But we must now return from the regions of the dead to the light of the living. Christ has obtained the dominion over mankind as a living unity, continued from generation to generation upon earth. His rule is that of a Saviour who governs the world for the accomplishment of the purposes of His saving grace.

He is the absolute Lord of all the living. His dominion is as universal as the virtue of His death. Before He became incarnate He ruled the world as its Creator : *the world is His, for He made it*, was the song of the morning stars. Before His death, the world was His as existing under the gracious anticipation of His death. But after His death the ancient song was translated for the new testament : *the world is His, for He hath redeemed it*. All nations are His and under His sway, whether they know it or not ; all peoples are His, whatever earthly governors they may serve ; all tribes are His, whatever religions they may hold. The gospel announces everywhere this truth ; it proclaims the Saviour's rights over the present world, while it establishes upon earth and in men's hearts a kingdom that is not of this world.

It is the probation of every man who hears the gospel to accept or reject that sway. And, as the subject is introduced by the apostle with reference to the allegiance of individuals, we have only to show that the test of personal character is the claim of Christ to absolute homage. The sin which sums up all sins in itself is unbelief towards Him. All judgment and all salvation are in the hands of the exalted Redeemer. *Kiss the Son*, was the old-testament poetry ; *He is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey Him*, is the plain new-testament prose. *As I live*, saith Christ, as quoted in this passage, *every knee shall bow to me*,

either in the submission which brings salvation, or in the subjection of eternal doom.

Rejection of Christ seals every man's fate. It is the effectual bar to salvation, both in this world and in that which is to come. Only at the cross is the eternal God *nigh at hand*; everywhere else He is *afar off*. For those that reject the mediation of Jesus there is no hope in the Father's mercy; He bids them first be reconciled to His Son's atonement, and then through that atonement He will be reconciled to them. The rejection of Christ, however, is only the rejection of the Saviour; as Lord He can be rejected by none. *No man liveth to himself; no man dieth to himself*. It may seem to the sinner that he owes no allegiance to Christ; he may take up the cry of the demons and say, *What have I to do with thee, Jesus of Nazareth!* Abusing His rightful Master's long-suffering, he may give his life to other lords. He may even blaspheme the holy name, and join those who mock the Representative of God that christianity sends. But it is all a miserable delusion, and the time is fast coming when he will be fearfully disenchanted. If he threw off the Lord's restraints in life, he will not shake off the bands in his death. Granted that he may seem to *live* to himself, to himself he cannot *die*. Sooner or later the rebel against the authority of Jesus will be arrested by His hand, and forced to give account of every word and every action of his life.

Acceptance of Christ's sway is the foundation of

personal religion. The first step in the way of the soul's submission finds Christ in the path: *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*. Conviction of sin is inwrought by the Spirit as the pleader for Christ; and with direct reference to Him as the test of sin, the source of righteousness, and the arbiter of judgment. Forgiveness is to be received only at the hands of Him who is exalted to bestow both it and the repentance that precedes it. The new life is the gift of Christ's Spirit. Sanctification is the supreme submission of the soul to Him. In short, the whole process of personal religion, from the first thought of return to God to the beatific vision, is no other than the absolute resignation of man's spirit to the gracious dominion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

2. Let us then close by contemplating the Redeemer's sway as an end accomplished in His people. *None of us*—says the apostle, with the emphasis now upon the *us*—*liveth to himself, no man dieth to himself*. The Lord to whom we have submitted has become the Director and the Disposer of our being.

He is its Director. The loyal subjects of Christ have renounced self, and taken Him to be their supreme Lord. The alternative is between self as the final authority in life, and Christ as the final authority; the question is not here of the ultimate portion and good of the soul, but of Him to whom it is responsible. God in Christ, the mediatorial Redeemer, claims the absolute

homage of the whole being of every one who *calleteth Him Lord*. And the true christian is one who has died to self and lives to Christ, who lives to Christ and dies to self, maintaining an ever-present sense of responsibility to His throne. *He that judgeth me is the Lord*, is the principle that animates the whole course of his life, and directs all its innumerable details. Every trifle of life—if life has any trifle in it—is dignified by this high law. There may indeed be theoretical difficulty in understanding how every slight act, word, opinion, or practice is to bear its comment at the eternal bar. But there is no practical difficulty to one who has utterly renounced self. The Redeemer's will is to be found for everything, either in precept, or principle, or example. Among *us*, says the apostle, this is the end of all controversy. *We* have a rule from which there is no appeal, and in the interpretation of which the sincere christian cannot go astray, or cannot otherwise than venially err. He that eateth, *eateth to the Lord*; he that eateth not, *to the Lord he eateth not*. And both alike do what they do, and refrain from what they do not, *to the Lord*, as doing His service. *So then every one of us shall give account of himself to the Lord*.

And He is the Disposer of life. We are governed by the law that all *die to the Lord*. The christian thinks of death as part of his Lord's will. He dismisses from his thought all other notions; and death to him shares in the general glorification that the gospel has shed on all truths and facts in human

history. There is now no chance, no accident, no premature departure. He confidently believes that, behind the veil, his Master is preparing his own individual mansion in the Father's house, and that he will enter that other world only when *He who hath the keys of death* shall call for him. More than that, he believes that death shall be to him only the minister of the Redeemer's own present will ; that Christ will order all its preliminaries, give His own supreme unction, and Himself be the guardian of His servant's disembodied spirit and of his dust until the resurrection. Hence death is part of his sum of duty, the final sacrifice and service of faith which he must one day and may soon be required to offer. He may desire to defer it ; he may ask the grace of a gentle departure ; but his whole life is a constant approach to the final altar. He makes it his study so to live that his death may seal the consecration of *himself*, his body, soul, and spirit, to the will of Christ.

Let us, in conclusion, bow down before the throne of our living Lord this day. Let us pay our tribute to that dominion which was attained at so great a cost, and is absolute over all ; and let us make it our solemn pledge that the dominion which is already supreme *over* mankind, shall be made perfect *within* each of our souls. So shall our Lord attain in us the end that He has already attained in the universe ; and we shall prove the full truth of the word—*He died and revived that He might be Lord of the dead and the living.*

IX.

THE RESURRECTION-TESTIMONY.

ACTS XIII. 32-34.

And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again: as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

ON any other occasion than this it would be becoming to pay our tribute to the first sermon—at least the first recorded sermon—of the apostle Paul. But on easter sunday we must forget the preacher, and dwell solely on his theme. And that is *Jesus and the resurrection*. Here we have the germ, or rather the full statement, of the apostle's doctrine—whether as a preacher in the Acts, or

as a teacher in the epistles—touching the relation of the resurrection to the christian scheme. Listening to this, his first discourse, we can estimate the deep emphasis of his later words: *If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain.*

But in this text it is not St Paul who bears witness; it is the eternal God himself. All the apostle does is to collect and unite in one strong argument three distinct quotations of the old testament, which contain the pith of ancient prophecy. If we take the quotations in an order of our own, which, however, will be faithful to St Paul's meaning, we hear in the last the Saviour's appeal on the way to His cross, the expression of His strong confidence that He should issue from the awful hour victorious, having opened the way of life to the children of sin and of death: *Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, or suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.* In the first the Father is addressing His Son as He comes forth from the sepulchre: *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee.* And in the third the apostle instructs us to hear the assurance of God to the whole world of mankind: *And I give unto you the sure mercies of David.* Let us reverently listen to the testimony which the supreme Witness of the resurrection bears: and for simplicity regard it as, first, the testimony of the Father concerning the Son uttered to Himself; and, secondly, the testimony of God concerning the Son uttered to the world. The Father receives His Son from the

dead, and gives Him back to us for ever. And may the Holy Spirit, the interpreter of this and every other event in the life of the Redeemer, teach us to understand His resurrection.

I. *Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten Thee.* This mysterious word, which the apostle by the Spirit of inspiration adduces as referring to the day of Christ's rising from the dead, stands at the opening of the book of psalms without any such key to its meaning. It is there, so to speak, a simple repetition and enlargement of the primitive promise given to the human race: the original prophecy of a deliverer of mankind set to music, and made the governing strain of Jewish song. The person promised here after long generations announces that He, the Son of God, was that Deliverer. *He declares the decree* which none but Himself had heard: that all authority in Zion, and in the heavens higher than Zion, was given to Him. And in the midst of this testimony we hear the declaration: *The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee.* St Paul refers these words to the resurrection, and the original Speaker appropriates them to His own person as the Son and the Christ of God.

I. *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee,* is the testimony of the Father, that He who rose from the dead was the eternal Son, that in His resurrection He was fully born into the world, and that the complacency of the Father in His

eternal Son was continued to that Son as manifested in the flesh.

(1.) The Person who came out of the womb of death is addressed as the Son of God : *Thou art* my Son. It is a fatal perversion of the words to understand, *This day Thou hast become* my Son. Had that been so, other words would have been used. But it means, Thee, my Son from all eternity, I this day receive as begotten in the nature of man and born to the human race. To establish this we only need to dwell upon the terms themselves as used everywhere in scripture. The very word, *Thou art*, expresses it at once. It is but a slight variation of the great *I am*, which gives the only notion that man can have of the divine eternity. *I am*—speaking of Himself: *Thou art*—the Father in the holy trinity speaking to the Son. Everywhere in the new testament the Son is said to be sent into the world. Instead of appealing to a long series of proofs, we need only refer to that one, wherein the apostle quotes the same passage, in the opening page of the epistle to the Hebrews. He makes it an argument of the supremacy of the Son over all angels and every creature. *Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?* Now that quotation stands between two passages, either of which shows in what an absolutely supreme sense the apostle understood the word Son. In the passage that precedes, the Son, who condescended to come down and purge our sins by His own blood, is *the*

brightness of the glory of God, the express image of His person. And in the passage that follows, *God saith to the Son, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands.* The Being who heard in the ineffable communion of the divine essence the words, *Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee*, was from eternity begotten, created all things by His power, and partakes of an eternal being in relation to which the visible things of creation are but as transitory vestures, folded and laid aside. But our defence of Christ goes back to His own lips at last for the end of controversy. At that solemn time of preparation for the end, when our Lord contended with His enemies in the temple, He closed all by saying as the Son, *Before Abraham was I AM*, and that was the conclusion of a discourse in which He had protested with the deepest emphasis, *I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me.* That *I am* was our *Thou art* in another form.

Let us then learn at the outset that the risen Redeemer continues to be, what He ever was, the Son of God. The incarnation of Jesus was only the continuation, in conjunction with another nature, of that Person who had been from the beginning the Son of God, begotten in an eternal *now* for which time has no computation. When our Lord came down to visit us in great humility He left no divine attribute behind Him; although,

in a manner transcending our capacity to understand, He emptied Himself of the form of God. Never in the deepest darkness of His obscuration was there a moment when the Father could not say, *Thou art my Son!*

(2.) But, while the Son of God never varied from that relation, and never could vary from it, being begotten of the Father in an eternity that knows nothing of the chronology of change, in His divine-human, or incarnate, Person, He is said in scripture to be begotten and born in time. And, while His birth in human nature was essentially perfect at His conception by the Holy Ghost, it is regarded as fully declared and realised in its perfection, only when He came forth from the dead.

There is no danger in saying that the human nature of our Lord was in a condition of imperfection before He rose from the sepulchre. Certainly, His humanity possessed at His birth all its attributes, and acquired nothing afterwards but experience of their depths and powers. But that human nature which was subject to manifold infirmities, which was from day to day more and more marred, and which was under the dread necessity of dissolution and the sepulchre, was not as yet the worthy representative of the second nature that the Son of God assumed. True, that its humiliation was its highest glory, and that expressly for the suffering of death, atoning death, it was assumed; yet, while that humiliation proceeded, and during the continuance of it, the Son was not fully revealed

in the glorious perfection of that idea which filled the Divine mind from eternity. His human vesture,—a vesture this which, created in time, is not to be folded and laid aside, but worn for ever—must be healed of its rents, and washed from its stains of blood, and raised to its highest dignity, before the eternal Son could be all that the divine purpose conceived in His incarnation.

Now that perfect idea was attained in the resurrection. That was the third day of which the Redeemer spoke: *I must walk to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.* Nothing was added to the dignity and supremacy of our Lord's humanity after that morning. The glory of heaven, indeed, still awaited Him; but it was already His own, to be assumed at pleasure, and, though it might enhance the exhibition of the Redeemer's majesty, it could impart nothing new to the perfection of His lower nature. That nature left its final indignity in the sepulchre. When the divine Spirit and the human soul again entered the flesh that had been put under the keeping of death, but secured inviolate from his touch,—then the birth of our Saviour among men was complete. Hence we may say that what began at Bethlehem was finished at the opened sepulchre. The *to-day* in which the Son of God, begotten before all worlds, was again begotten in mankind, may be safely said to embrace the whole sacred space of our Saviour's life upon earth. The thirty and three years are to the Lord as one day: more, they are compressed as it

were into one moment—a moment pregnant with eternal issues. The entire history of the redeeming Man of sorrows is the moment of an infinite birth. The manger and the sepulchre join hard together, with the cross between them. Looked down upon from heaven the trinity is a blessed unity. The glory of the night of the Nativity and the glory of the morning of Easter melt into one. The angels continued their song, though men heard them not: *Unto you is born this day*. And may we not say that St Paul fills his easter morning thoughts with christmas memories, when he cries, *And we, not angels now but men, bring unto you glad tidings*.

(3.) But these words are more than a mere statement of fact. When the Father thus spake to the Son, it was the language of infinite complacency that He used. The unbounded joy that there had been in the communion of Eternity was not interrupted, suspended, or modified by the new manifestation. On the contrary, to the love wherewith the Father *loved His Son from the foundation of the world*, there is added a new element of delight in Him, arising from the sacrifice He had offered, and the work He had done, and the sufferings He had undergone. We are speaking of things too high for our speculation; although not too high for our reverent pondering. The communion between the eternal God and His incarnate Son is a secret we cannot penetrate; but to dwell on it and be confounded by it is joy.

Who can help recalling former instances on which this ancient testimony was quoted, or rather repeated, by the Father over His Son? First, when His human nature was replenished with the treasures of wisdom and grace at the baptism, there was a heavenly attestation of the divine complacency in the new birth of the Son. 'Then once more on the mount of transfiguration, when for one night and without restraint there was a transient realisation of the divine purpose in our glorified human nature. On both these occasions the word of the text was quoted in part: the quotation was suspended; for *to-day* was not fully come. Now, however, it is quoted in full. *This is my beloved Son* reverts back to the ancient oracle, *Thou art my Son: this day I have begotten Thee.*

Here, then, we have the welcome of infinite complacency with which the suffering Son of God and Son of man is received by His Father from the world of death—to suffer and to die no more. *This my Son was dead, and is alive again!*

2. But this incarnate Son is the Messiah, the Anointed, in the original psalm; the sanctified mediator between God and men. And as the Christ also the word holds good, that in the day of the resurrection He was fully begotten. We may view this in relation to His work generally, and then to His offices in particular, to each of which in a distinct quotation St Paul refers the words of the text.

(1.) The promise of the Messiah was not

fulfilled until the Redeemer raised up in our nature had risen from the dead, as the apostle intimates by using the same word. On that day all the preparations of Christ were completed, and He was fully given to the world; on that day He was born to us as the finished Saviour, Christ. When the fulness of time was come and the Redeemer was born of the Virgin, there remained yet a further *day* of waiting and preparation before He became the anointed Saviour of mankind. Even after His baptism, when the Divine Spirit sealed Him to His mission, there remained yet an *hour* to which He ever more looked forward, and of which He so often said that it was *not yet come*. When that hour was come, and He poured out His soul unto death for the expiation of human sin, then He was begotten from the womb of the sepulchre as the perfect Christ—*made* perfect as such by His sufferings, *declared* to be perfect as such by His resurrection. This second baptism was the consummation of the former. When He came up from the waters of the Jordan, the heavens opened over Him in sublime attestation and closed again. Now when He comes up from the waters of the passion through the sepulchre, the heavens opened to shut no more, but to receive Him as the anointed Redeemer. Through His death He became the living Christ: and to Him, with all His Christly attributes made perfect, was the word spoken: *this day I have begotten Thee*.

(2.) It is a full confirmation of this that we find

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the text thrice quoted by St Paul, with express reference to each of the three offices of the Redeemer. This great oracle of the first psalm is cited only by the apostle, and applied to the prophetic, priestly, and royal functions of Christ. Let us glance at them in their order.

In the opening of the epistle to the Hebrews the saying is used to assert the superior dignity of the Son in comparison of angels and all other ministers of the Divine will. But observe that it is of the Son, not as the eternal oracle of God—the essential Revealer of His Person for ever—but of the Son as speaking in these last days, and superseding or rather consummating the prophets and their revelations; of the Son who began His ministry of teaching on earth, but now *speaketh from heaven*. Christ the teacher of mankind only *began to do and teach* before His resurrection. The *hear Him* of the mount was an anticipation. He did not reveal all the will of God, and perfect the christian oracles, until He rose again. Then when the great central truth of His cross was taught by the opening of His heart, the full tide of other christian truth was poured out without reserve. He went up to a higher mountain, and when He was set *there*, He opened his mouth again. In other words, it was at the resurrection that the Father could say to His Messiah the Revealer, *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee*.

Not long afterwards, in the same epistle to the Hebrews, St Paul, his mind filled with this great

word, quotes it again, with direct reference to the priestly office of Christ. Mark once more the order of the thought. The Redeemer *glorified not Himself to be made an High Priest*. He assumed that office not as the supreme God, but in union with our nature, without which He could not have been an adequate priest of the human race. He glorified Him who said in the early psalm prophetically, and on the resurrection said literally and plainly, as of an accomplished reality, *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee*. Then He was declared to be the all-sufficient High Priest. Before that time He only prepared for His solemn function. His holy life sealed Him as a perfectly holy victim; in His passion He poured out His soul as an oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and, as He was leaving the world to assume His place of priestly intercession and benediction at the right hand of God, the Father said to the *High Priest of our profession*, now fully furnished for His ever blessed function, *This day I have begotten Thee*.

There remains one more office, and that the supreme of the three, as uniting the others in itself. The kingly authority of Christ is the leading theme of the text in the Acts on which our attention is now fixed, and it was of the King in Zion that the word was first used in the psalm: when the Son there utters the great revelation of what He alone had heard as yet, *The Lord said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten Thee*, the response He

hears and we hear is, *I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.* He was not set there, He was not invested with supreme authority, until He had died and risen. *To this end Christ died and rose and revived, that He might be Lord of the dead and living.* A kingdom He had before, not of this world : for as the eternal Son He was Lord of the universe. But He came *to receive another kingdom and return* : a kingdom that could not be attained but through dying for it. In anticipation of His atoning conquest of the world He was always from the beginning saluted as King; and He used, though with reserve, the language of a king throughout His humiliation. But it was not till the resurrection had declared the Son of man to be the Lord of all, that He could summon His Church to hear His own assumption of dominion : *All power is given to Me in heaven and earth.* And before He said that word to His disciples, His Father had said it to Him, according to the prophecy of the psalm : *This day, O my Son, raised from Thy victorious death, I have begotten Thee* as the heir of all My power.

Summing up the whole, brethren, we hear the Father's testimony to His Son, that incarnate Person who is the consecrated Messiah : a testimony uttered ages before in the depths of the eternal counsel between the divine Persons ; but now uttered at the open sepulchre as the witness of the accomplishment of the purposes of God in the gift of the Son to our human nature. My perfect

incarnate Son : this day I receive Thee in Thy new humanity as born to me and mankind for ever ; this day I proclaim Thee to be my finished Messiah, prepared for all Thine offices of teaching, expiation, and government ; and the love with which I have loved Thee from eternity rests in its plenitude for Thee and Thine upon Thy new and now finished incarnate Person.

Then turning to us, the Father says, as His resurrection-greeting to men : In Him *I give you the sure mercies of David*. This testimony, too, let us now devoutly hear.

II. The passage quoted by the apostle is introduced for the purpose of proving that Christ must have risen from the dead ; of intimating to His hearers how surely ratified were the promises of the christian covenant ; and of pointing the thoughts of all to a living administrator of those blessings. In His resurrection Christ is given to the world as the fulfilment of promise, and His *mercies are sure* ; He liveth to bestow them ; and ever shall live to fulfil the last promise.

1. In the ancient prophecy of Isaiah, Jehovah promises to the nations of the world, then and for long ages afterwards sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, *I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the sure mercies of David*. That is : I will give you also, O Gentiles, a place and a name among my people ; and the true, eternal David shall reign over you. Then, in the same prophecy,

the promise is varied : *Behold, I have given Him for a witness to the people, a leader and a commander to the people.* Then once more the strain changes, and the Redeemer himself is addressed : *Thou shalt call a nation that Thou knowest not, and nations that knew not Thee shall run unto Thee, because of the Lord Thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel, for He hath glorified Thee.* In these last words lies the connexion between the fulfilment of the promise and the resurrection. Christ was glorified by His victory over death. The hour of His submission to the agony of the passion and the curse of the law was the hour of His glorification. Hence St Paul declares that the promise of the sure mercies of David was dependent on the resurrection of Christ for its fulfilment, and that in the resurrection of Christ it was in the fullest sense, to Jews and Gentiles, fulfilled.

Then, generally speaking, Christ as the great promise to the fathers was given to the world in the resurrection. He was then perfectly given, and given to all mankind.

(1.) As we have seen that the Son of God was not perfectly born in our nature, and made a perfect Saviour, until He had died and risen again, so we are now taught by the apostle that He was only a promise to the world until He rose from the dead. This was the great fulfilment of the promises made to the fathers from the beginning. They all converged to the morning of the resurrection : not one of the multitude of prophetic announce-

ments touching the blessings of Messiah's kingdom but absolutely required the visible return of Jesus from the dead. But it is observable that St Paul here uses the word *promise* in the singular number : implying that great primitive announcement of a deliverer for mankind which was given in the sad dawn of human history : that one precious fountain of promise which poured forth the river of life and hope that disparted afterwards and spread through a thousand lesser channels in the oracles of God. That promise was a Deliverer from sin : and, however viewed, Christ was not given to man as a Deliverer from sin until He rose from the dead. It may help our meditations on this subject if we dwell upon the three aspects of our Lord's delivering work that are made prominent in scripture. He delivered from sin by an atoning sacrifice, by the bestowment of a spirit of new life, and by the abolition of death, the penalty of sin. In His resurrection the Father gave him to mankind as in these three respects a Redeemer.

The great redemption which was promised from the beginning was a redemption from the curse of the law. That was the real enemy, more terrible than the serpent, who held mankind in bondage. Satan was only the representative of that direst woe, the curse of God upon transgression. The Redeemer was foreannounced through past ages by prophecies, and types, and symbols, that all pointed to the shedding of atoning blood : the blood of one in whose self-sacrifice the Father

should have such complacency as to avail for the salvation of mankind. In the fulness of time He came ; assumed the body that had been prepared for Him ; ended the economy of type, and shadow, and promise ; and effected the great reality of redemption. He absorbed the doom of the law into His own sacred person ; and, being made a curse for us, delivered us from the curse.

But though when He cried *It is finished* the redemption was an accomplished reality in heaven, it was not known to be such upon earth. Angels and men had seen the Redeemer die—not, indeed, after the manner of all men,—but sink some mysterious way under the common doom, amidst the terrors that might seem to accompany the execution of an awful sentence. They had heard Him cry, *My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me ?* and had seen His body laid in the sepulchre. Seeing no more, well might the disappointed cry arise, *We thought that it was He who should have redeemed the world.* On the third day, God, remembering the sure mercies, not of David or Abraham, but of Adam, raised up His Son : presented Him to the world as one whose atonement had been accepted, and gave Him to us *declared to be the Son of God with power*, with the power of human redemption.

St Paul elsewhere interprets his own word *promise* as being the gift of the Spirit. The same Deliverer who saved the world from the curse by dying in man's stead, saves it by sending the blessing of

spiritual life, the life of His own Spirit delivering from sin and death. This was the great *Promise*, St Peter tells us, *of the Father*; that is to say, the gift of the Holy Spirit as the power of a new nature and a new life was one great part of the original promise to the race. But that promise was not fulfilled until the resurrection. It could not, indeed, have been fulfilled without it. The resurrection of the Redeemer was the demonstration and pledge that He was Himself the Fountain of a divine life that death could not touch. He was given to us from the sepulchre as Head of our race, having received through the virtue of the atonement the boundless fulness of the Holy Spirit to distribute to His members upon earth. Had our Lord not been raised up into this world's life again—had He gone by some other way to His throne—it would perhaps have made no essential difference in heaven. But how blessed a demonstration would have been wanting upon earth! We need not, however, entertain such almost irreverent speculation. *Because I live, ye shall live also*, had our Lord promised; and explained that promise by assuring us of the gift of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of His own divine life. Before He poured out upon His people the plenitude of that gift, He showed Himself to His disciples alive, that they might know from whom it came. And here the Father is represented as presenting His Son, risen from the dead by the virtue of His own divinity, to the world, and saying, In this My

risen Son receive the pledge of a new and better divine life to flow from Him to you for ever.

Christ is also a Deliverer of mankind from the consequences of sin—sorrow, and death, and hell. Throughout the ancient scriptures, the great friend of the human race who was to come was promised as a Deliverer from death and the miseries consequent upon sin. He was to bring an eternal redemption from all the boundless calamities that followed the entrance of the first transgression. That promise was fulfilled in the resurrection of our Lord. He arose as the *first-begotten from the dead*, as the pledge of the future resurrection of His saints, and the forerunner of them into endless life. Indeed, it may be said that the great promise was fulfilled to us by becoming a promise again. While the Redeemer is already a Deliverer from the curse, and the Fountain of spiritual life to those who believe, He is our Saviour from all the penalties of sorrow and death only in hope.

But His resurrection is a sufficient pledge. *Because I live, ye shall live also*, covers all the necessities and aspirations of our fallen nature. When Jesus came forth from the sepulchre, He was given to man as the Prince of life: not only *the Witness and Covenant of the people*, but their *Leader* also. He has the keys of hell and of death; He openeth heaven, and no man shutteth; He shutteth hell, and no man openeth. He is perpetually gathering to Himself his sufferers, released

from death, and, like Himself, conquering death by dying. And He is for ever looking forward, with His saints on earth and in paradise, to that final day of eternal fulfilment, when all the effects of evil shall be effaced for ever, when man shall forget the sorrow of his probation for joy that he is saved, and the only result of his past sin shall be his eternal gratitude to his Redeemer.

(2.) In His resurrection, Jesus was given to the world. The apostle might appear, at the first glance, to limit the gift to the Jewish people. But that is only in appearance. The *sure mercies of David* were the promises to David of a successor to *sit upon his throne for ever*; but the prophet Isaiah, as we have seen, expressly promised to the Gentiles that this Commander should rule over them also, and St Paul only seemed to narrow the fulfilment of the promise because he was addressing Jewish hearers. The glory of the day of Christ's resurrection is, that then God gave His Son to the world. That promise was fulfilled which was given long before the law, long before the oath to David, long before the covenant with Abraham—the promise of a Son of man from God to save the race. Jesus Christ, of the seed of Abraham, tasted death for every man; and the glad tidings preached on the morning of His resurrection concerned the whole world of mankind.

Hence, brethren, the term *glad tidings* is now again adopted. Once uttered at the birth of Christ, it had been almost suspended until His second

birth. At least, the full and free announcement that the angels promised waited for this brighter day. The gospel is the proclamation of a risen Saviour, who is *Lord of all*. Let us hear the glad tidings for ourselves, and resolve to proclaim them to others. Whatever the apostle might mean, we may give their very highest energy to his words : *Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift*. Nor can we better show our gratitude than by endeavouring, with all our power, to assist in spreading the glad tidings everywhere. We are met this day to commemorate the best gift of God to our fallen world : let us hallow our commemoration by accepting that great gift ourselves, and by uniting our prayers and our efforts for the promulgation of its blessing everywhere.

2. This leads us to consider the Resurrection as assuring us of a living Administrator of the mercies of the gospel. The sure mercies of our King David are sure because He ever liveth to dispense them. The two points which St Paul impresses are these—that He liveth, and that He always liveth : in both these respects unlike David, His type, to whom the promises were given.

(1.) Our Saviour, as King in Zion, is a living Saviour. David served God in his generation, and fell asleep : he lived and died. Our King died, and now liveth. He holds in His hands the mercies of the christian covenant, and our faith must go to Him as a living Saviour.

He is in heaven on a throne which is a throne

in Zion. From that throne He dispenses all His blessings. Having obtained the benefits of salvation at an infinite cost, He now lives only to dispense them. The most impressive and affecting guarantee we can have that the mercies of redemption are sure to us is, that they are in His hands. This is the great argument of St Paul's first sermon, and it is applied with touching force throughout his writings. He is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, seeing He *ever liveth* to make intercession for them; and St Paul's Master, our Lord himself, when He appeared at the giving of the Apocalypse, uttered His own final ratification of that truth for the assurance of His church for ever: *I am He that liveth and was dead, and I am alive for evermore.* He is the Head over all things to the Church; its living Head; living only for our benefit. He is supreme in the administration of mercy as well as judgment, having all authority, in one sense, under God as His Father; in another sense, not under God, as being God Himself. And our eternal security rests upon the fact that He to whom this boundless authority is given is *man* over men, while *God* with God. All His *holy things* are *sure*.

Then, brethren, our faith in Him must be trust in a living person. We are taught this lesson by the apostle here, and by the new testament everywhere. *Be it known unto you*, is St Paul's application of his first sermon, *that through this Man*

is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all who believe are justified from all things. Justification here stands as the representative of the blessings that follow it; all are dispensed by a living Person, who died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification. We must think of Him as a living Saviour; as certainly living before us as He was living before men who came for His blessing when He was on earth, but with far wider grace to impart. It is to Him, as a personal Lord, that the penitent rebel must submit, renouncing his enmity to God at the feet of Jesus. It is to Him, as a personal Dispenser of forgiveness, that the mourning penitent must look for the pardon of his sins. It is not only to the cross that he must find his way: He is not there; He is risen. It is to that exalted Redeemer who has now come down from the cross to save us, though He would not come down to save Himself. From His hand directly, through the Holy Spirit, we receive forgiveness, and the assurance of it. It is to Him, as a personal Lord, that the believer must perform his duty, and from Him that he must receive his blessing. All grace flows from the union of the soul with the living personal Redeemer, who, by the Holy Ghost, dwells in our midst, beholds us face to face, and exercises over every one of us a government that is familiar with its every subject. This King keeps His court ever open: all Israel, and every man and woman in Israel, has access to Him at all times. There is no lesson of easter morning more

important, brethren, than that we have to do with a personal living Lord.

(2.) St Paul further impresses upon our minds the assurance that Christ *ever* liveth. David, His type, served his own generation by the will of God. Our greater David serveth all generations in a ministry that shall continue till its ends are accomplished.

This opens up to our view the great truth that Christ is from age to age working out His glorious designs in the church for the salvation of the world. David, in the kingdom over which he was set, executed the will of God, ill or well, for a whole generation : fighting the battles of the Lord, subduing his enemies, and consolidating the kingdom. He then fell asleep, and left to be accomplished by his successor the better part of the divine work in Israel—the building of God's house. Our King David ruleth in a spiritual kingdom ; He is also warring, with spiritual weapons, against the foes of His religion ; and gradually, by the agency of His church, winning the world to Himself. And as He is discharging His ministry of warfare against His enemies, so He is building the house of God from age to age. Thus He is David and Solomon united in sublime and heavenly realisation.

We, brethren, are the subjects of Christ, and His agents in this great work. Every one of us is called to co-operate with this great Servant-King, who is establishing a holy empire for eternity. While

His ministry embraces all generations, and includes all people, to each of *us* He assigns his own little function, and a scanty measure of days wherein to discharge it; and then—*fulfilling our course*, like John; having *ministered to our generation*, like David—we fall asleep and rest. Meanwhile the church, which is the organisation through which He carries out His great designs, has a mission, that death does not suspend, to carry out the challenge to the world to submit to His authority. Besides our own personal part in the kingdom—the duty each has to discharge in his generation—we are bound up with the general agency of the church, which, with its Head, dieth no more, but serves all the generations of time. Let that great truth—that one feeble contribution of effort is added to the work of an immortal society—tend to excite our ardour and ennoble all our views.

And we have the assurance that the designs of Christ shall be accomplished. The mercies promised to David, in keeping for the world, are not only the spiritual benefits of grace to which we have so much alluded, but also the final success of Christianity, as preached to all nations of men. The resurrection of Christ is the pledge that His kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion extend over the whole earth. *He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet.* He will not suffer His purposes to be defeated. He will preserve His church to the end. He that now keepeth Israel neither slumbereth in inactivity

nor sleepeth in death. He will win the world to Himself. He will displace every power that thwarts His own ; sweep away every vestige of idolatry and heathenism from the face of the earth ; establish His own kingdom over the whole world ; and present the human race, with the original promise fulfilled, to the God whose eternal love appointed Him for its salvation. And then, when the family of man is restored to God, those only being lost who would not be saved, He also, our supreme Minister, shall have served His long generation of service ; the prayers of our David, too, shall have ended ; His government, as King in Zion, shall cease ; and God, in the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, shall be all in all.

Thus, brethren, we have heard the resurrection-testimony of God himself to the world through the church. He gives unto us, in His incarnate Son, the perfected Messiah, the sure mercies promised through all ages, and now fulfilled. This is His gift to the world, which is a gift for all eternity. Let us, in conclusion, bow down before the throne of our incarnate King, adoring Him as the eternal Son made man, while we trust in Him as the man made God, our everlasting Representative in heaven. Let us respond to the blessed testimony we this day hear by pouring out our souls in fervent gratitude : *Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.*

X.

THE ASSUMPTION.

MATT. XXVIII. 16-18.

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him ; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

THE first evangelist here closes his record with the most glorious scene in the history of our Lord's life upon earth. It takes us into the mysterious interval between the Redeemer's return from the kingdom of the dead and His entrance into heaven. The passion is past for ever, and has been interpreted by the resurrection. The ascension, belonging rather to heaven than earth, has not yet come. Though the heavens wait to receive Him, and the everlasting gates lift up their heads to admit the King of glory, and the angels are ready with their

ancient song, He is not in haste to leave the scenes of His humiliation. His throne is still vacant for forty days, while in shadowy midway existence between earth and heaven, released from the conditions of life in the flesh but not yet glorified into His heavenly life, He still holds occasional fellowship with the companions of His humbled estate, with those who had been *with Him in His temptation*.

All the transactions of this wonderful period revolve around one central idea, the establishment of His kingdom upon earth. This was the absorbing thought of the risen Redeemer during those lingering weeks. But that ruling thought finds its most emphatic expression on this mountain in Galilee. The event we now contemplate is the prominent scene in the history of these supernumerary days of the Son of man. This mountain without a name is the most exalted of the three that are glorious in St Matthew's gospel. On the first the Lord re-uttered and glorified the Law, making it the new Sinai without its terrors. On the second He received the seal of His perfection as the Sacrifice, and the earnest of His dignity as the King, and the confirmation of His rights as the Lawgiver of His people. But from that mount He descended again. On this, the third mount, He is transfigured and received into a cloud of glory, which, however, fades away no more.

On this mountain in Galilee, to which we now in thought repair, the Lord received the first con-

vocation of His church ; and in the midst of His assembled people He assumed His highest mediatorial office.

I. This is the final, or, as in another sense it may be termed, the first convocation of the disciples of Christ.

It was an event to which the Redeemer attached much significance, and for which He made much preparation. He planned it before His departure. *All ye shall be offended because of me this night : for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But, after I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.* Foreseeing their transient defection, He fixed upon this rallying-place to which they should direct their steps when *they should be converted.* The night of His sorrow was darkening around Him and them when He spoke ; but before He was hidden from their eyes He appointed this meeting of reconciliation and peace. There was therefore a deep and solemn meaning in these words, pointing to one special assembly after the sorrows of death and separation should be over.

He remembered that appointment immediately after His resurrection, and took measures that they should remember it also. Though He tarried not to announce it Himself, He left the angels to command all who might come : *Go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead ; and behold He goeth before you into Galilee ; there ye shall see*

Him ; behold I have told you. How emphatic this remembrancer was meant to be we may judge from what follows : as they went St Mark tells us Jesus met them, and again said, *Be not afraid ; go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee. There they shall see me !* We expect the fulfilment of the promise ; and, receiving the account in St Matthew alone, might assume that one sublime meeting—surpassing all others in grandeur and solemnity—will soon occur. But time passes and there is no sign that it is about to take place. The Lord evidently postpones the day. He sees the disciples again and again in Jerusalem. He lingers still invisibly amidst the scenes of His humiliation. He makes mysterious transitions from the world unseen by man to the world of sight. Here and there we discern His form for a few brief moments or hours only. But of that meeting nothing as yet is said. It is, however, an assembly for which the set time will come.

Meanwhile, the intelligence circulates. The Saviour's end is answered. It becomes generally known that the risen Lord will on a certain mountain, and at a certain hour, manifest Himself once more. Some weeks pass away, and the tidings spread. What intense excitement such a rumour, so well authenticated, would occasion, need not be dwelt upon ; nor with what swift despatch it would be transmitted from lip to lip, and from heart to heart, to the uttermost region of the holy land, wherever Christ's disciples were. Every humble

worshipper of His name would determine to be there. Every sincere though weak disciple, every believer whose faith had failed, every mourner whose conscience was afflicted, every doubter who yearned for final assurance would look towards that hill in Galilee with strong desire.

At the appointed time the congregation are assembled : the first general gathering of the Lord's disciples. They have come from all parts, converging from the north, and the south, and the east, and the west, to one sacred centre, the risen Person of the Lord. The circumstances of this first and best christian pilgrimage are not recorded. The evangelist gives us no preparatory narrative. Much is left to our own reverent imagination. But the *five hundred brethren at once*, whose united testimony to the resurrection St Paul refers to, formed doubtless the convocation of which we now speak : the central meeting after the resurrection.

They wait on the sides of this mountain, and, as they wait in awe and hope, the Lord himself was suddenly in the midst. In the simple language of the evangelist, *He came and spake unto them*—the same Jesus, and yet how different now from Him whom they had known ! the same to the eye of faith—changed to the eye of fear. Some there were in that large assembly whose eyes were holden that they could not see—*some doubted* ; but these could not have been any of the eleven, whose last throb of hesitation had long been stilled. Nor were they more than the

few exceptions to the general rule. To the eye and to the ear of prepared faith He was the same Jesus, though now invested with a higher dignity, and clothed, as it were, in new garments of majesty. His glorification was already dawning upon His head. That greater transfiguration had already begun the brightness of which was never to fade away ; and from His adoring servants He received, as Immanuel, Godman, the Head of the new church, the delivered Surety of the human race, full and fervent worship—the first such worship, save that of angels, that He had ever received, and earnest of the worship that should fill the ages of time and eternity.

The immediate design of this august assembly we may more specifically consider : first in relation to the disciples, and then in relation to the future church.

1. There can be no question that its design was, in the gracious intention of the Redeemer, to give every living disciple an opportunity of beholding his Lord, and hearing His voice once more before He finally departed ; and thus to make the entire extant church a collective witness of the resurrection of its Head.

His sufferings had alienated many of them, and His death had scattered them far and wide. Even the innermost circle had been shaken in their fidelity : much more had the general mass of the disciples wavered and been overpowered by the awful intelligence from Jerusalem. Individuals

and small companies He had met again and again. The apostles, individually and collectively, had been won back from their revulsion of fear and despondency. The greatest doubter among them had been transformed into the highest confessor. Two of His disciples He had intercepted on their way to Emmaus. Simon's great sin He had pardoned in secret, and more than once had given the eleven the assurance of His peace. But He had not as yet been seen of the whole body of His people, and it was His will that all who called Him Lord should have the opportunity of losing their doubts in the glory of His presence, and having their forgiveness sealed by His own lips. Not one should have to say, I saw Him not. It was not His will to visit them again from village to village: no more would He go over the cities of Israel. But He appointed a central and sequestered meeting-place, where, in the secret of His pavilion, and hidden from the strife of tongues, He would blend and bless them all in one happy fellowship, and they should together see their *King in His beauty*.

Galilee was chosen: Galilee, where the Lord began His ministry, and gathered His first disciples, and wrought His first miracles; where He had uttered His first and most abundant teaching; where His human spirit had found its deepest repose, and which was hallowed by the remembrances of His Father's supreme honour. Galilee was chosen, where the largest number of His

followers was always found, and where the great bulk of them were driven by fear ; Galilee of the Gentiles, too, where, as if between the Holy Land and the wide world, He might most appropriately assume His sceptre of universal rule. There, perhaps on the very mountain on which He had received the foretaste of His exaltation, He would now come and be crowned in the midst of His brethren.

2. But these disciples represented the future church. This was the first meeting of the risen Redeemer with His people. As He appeared that day in the midst of His worshipping and doubting servants, He was the Representative of His future Self in the midst of the congregation worshipping, though not without doubt, to the end of time.

He received His people at the appointed *place* : not mount Zion, discrowned and desolate now until the end, as the scene of limited worship, but an unnamed mountain, type of every place of meeting between Christ and His people for ever. He received them at the appointed *time*—to signify that He would always be present to receive His worship and to communicate His will when the concerted hour has come. But, above all, He received that congregation as the representative of His future kingdom-church ; and in the midst of it announced His assumption of His mediatorial kingdom. He gathered His servants together to hear that He had begun His reign. He did not announce His dominion first in heaven, but

amongst His humblest followers, and in the humblest way. Peter, James, and John are no longer selected as chosen witnesses. The whole militant church on earth was assembled to witness His proclamation, to hear Him assert His government, and to receive His supreme and final commands.

II. Let us then consider these ulterior purposes more at large.

1. Here we have our Lord's proclamation of His own kingly authority before His church. As such, it marks a new era in the history of the incarnate Redeemer: the moment in which He assumed the power that had been waiting for Him through ages and generations; which He was to obtain over all flesh by offering Himself as the atonement for sin; which He obtained by dying, which was assured to Him and to us by the resurrection, which He would begin to exercise at the ascension: a government whose administration and increase would fill the ages of time, and, ending in one sense with the day of judgment, would, in another sense, begin again, though no longer as a mediatorial dominion, to end no more.

Here our Lord proclaims Himself as King in Zion. In this third department of His redeeming ministry, as in the other two that led to it, He is His own herald, and inaugurates Himself.

Before He entered on His course upon earth, and while He was only the coming Redeemer, He had been heralded by the prophets: all the

testimonies of inspiration, from the first message that broke the silence of our doomed world, had converged, with deep unanimity, into one great word—*thy King cometh*. When He was brought into the world—the First-begotten, and the Desire of nations—angels announced and worshipped Him, in their full anticipation of His future dominion. So also, when He was manifested unto Israel, the Father gave His heavenly attestation: sealing His Son to His office by the eternal Spirit, and confirming that consecration by the human ministry of John the Baptist.

But, as He entered upon the successive stages of His redeeming work, our Lord sent no herald before His face. He announced Himself, and was His own forerunner. In the synagogue, at Nazareth, He unrolled the volume of the Book in which His prophetic office was most fully declared, and that day, in their ears, began His ministry as the great Teacher. Before His sacrificial death, He put on His priestly vestments, offered up His consecration prayer, and said, *I sanctify myself*. And now, upon this mountain, type of His higher throne, the Prophet-Priest added another name to His wonderful Person. Choosing His infant church to be the witnesses of His inauguration, He arrayed Himself, as it were, in His royal robes, and ascended His throne. He then Himself enacted, in holy earnest, the scene which Pilate enacted in half-serious mockery, and said, *Behold your King!*

More particularly, the Lord announces that the

dominion He now assumed was at once the object for which He came, and the end of His mediatorial work : *all power is given unto Me.*

The government of mankind, as a Saviour, was, in a certain sense, the predetermined goal of His life. He simply announces that, as He had received and discharged every other commission, so this also was consigned to His hands. He does not summon His disciples to tell them that He had succeeded in a great experiment, that He had accomplished a successful revolt against the god of this world, or that He had deserved so well of His Father that the jurisdiction of human affairs had been given Him as a reward. He gathered them together that He might announce His attainment of the object for which He had appeared in the flesh : to this *end was He born*, not only that He might bear witness to the truth, but that He might be the *Lord of all*. Christ's kingly office, as the consummation of His redeeming work, had been the theme of as express prediction as His coming and sufferings and death. There was the same absolute necessity for the one as the other. He *must* suffer, and He *must enter into His glory*. At no moment was there any contingency in the Saviour's prospect of dominion. Hence no reference is here made by express terms to the means whereby the dominion had been attained. *All power is give unto Me*, dates back from the beginning of time : He was the King crowned by anticipation before the world was.

But, while the Lord does not refer to the atoning sacrifice through which He had attained His supremacy, He implies, in His utterance before this resurrection-gathering, that His high authority was given Him as the fruit of His passion. His dominion is the end of a necessary series—life, death, and rising from the dead.

He came to vanquish sin by an atoning death : to destroy the dominion of sin, whether viewed as a sentence of holy wrath in the Divine nature, or as a power of evil in man's nature. However we regard the bondage of man, Christ's death was his deliverance. Hence as the Lord approached His cross, there was but one solution of its mystery that escaped His lips, and that anticipated His casting out of Satan and supremacy over all flesh. But man's redemption from the curse of the law, from the tyranny of sin, from the accusation of Satan, and from the penalties of death, was but one aspect of Christ's redeeming work. He redeemed us that He might rule over us. He did not, on presenting the atoning oblation which ransomed mankind, at once lay down His office and function ; rather He only then fully began it : then followed what we may truly term the *active* in opposition to the *passive* ministry of the Redeemer. He died that He might reign. Not otherwise could He obtain this crown than by dying for it, though none could withstand Him in His way to it. Thus, while He omits the express declaration, we understand, as they understood who first heard it, the

given unto Me as signifying the blessed fruit of a self-sacrifice unto death.

The Lord not only interprets the design of His death, but declares that His resurrection was to His church the demonstration of His supremacy. Strictly speaking, this appearance of Christ must be regarded as immediately following His return from the dead, and as His formal announcement of that return. He declares that He had complied with the terms of the mediatorial covenant, and that all power was now legitimately His own in the economy of grace. This was that third day of which He had spoken: *the third day I shall be perfected*. Silently referring to all He had undergone, He presents Himself to them alive as our emancipated Surety. He sank as the Son of God *made man* under the doom of man's sin; but He rose as the *Son of God made man*, in token that death had lost its power, and that He reigned in its stead. Here is the full force of the saying *is given*. As the eternal and co-equal Son of God eternal existence had been His necessary *gift* from the Father; but His atoning death had obtained for His incarnate Person another gift—the power over all flesh, and supremacy over all things for man.

2. The nature and extent of this authority must next engage our attention. The words which proclaim it are the loftiest, as they are the last, words of Christ concerning Himself. They are the fulfilment of all the utterances of the past, and the new beginning of all future revelation: the central

words therefore of holy scripture. Their meaning is inexhaustible ; but we can only indicate two aspects of that meaning. *All power in heaven and earth* must signify, on the one hand, absolute authority everywhere ; and, on the other, supreme authority in heaven for man upon earth. The latter concerns us most.

But the former is not excluded. *Heaven and earth* is throughout the scripture a phrase that embraces the compass of the universe. Now, in virtue of His eternal divinity, all creatures were His by a right which His incarnation did not resign. But, through His self-sacrifice in our nature, He obtained in another sense the dominion of all things. His glorified humanity having become one of the essential natures of His wonderful Person, all the rights and prerogatives of the higher passed over to the lower, and became the rights and prerogatives of the Godman. But, as in the economy of redemption the incarnate Son is always subordinate to the Father, receiving from Him His great commission and the fulness of His Spirit, so the government of the universe is represented as the gift and reward of the Father bestowed on the obedience of His Son. All this being true, we turn with our human hearts to the second meaning of the words : *All power is given unto Me in heaven for man upon earth.*

Here heaven is not the sum of other worlds than our own, but the presence of God, the scene of our Saviour's present ministry, as transferred from the

outer courts to the holiest: the hidden sanctuary in which behind the veil He conducts our cause. His supremacy is twofold: on the one hand He is the Governor of the whole earth; on the other He is the Dispenser of salvation in the continuous exercise of His saving function. In the former case absolute power is meant: in the latter, saving authority.

1. All power over earth is exercised by Him in heaven. He ascended to His heaven and ours: not only to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, but to the new and superadded glory of power over all flesh. When He returned to His Father's presence, having found eternal redemption, He looked down upon the world as His own. Then was brought to its fulfilment the whole strain of hebrew prophecy as finding its consummation in Daniel, the man greatly beloved. He saw, in the vision of the night, *One like unto the Son of man brought near before the Ancient of days; and there was given unto Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him.* St John, the Daniel of the new testament, interprets his vision as he interpreted Belshazzar's. He saw in the day reality what Daniel in the night-visions could not see: that on the vesture of this Lord of prophecy—a vesture dipped in blood—*there was a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

It is this supremacy of the Son of man in

heaven that explains the present continuance of the world. Because it is a province which His forbearance rules, it goes on its guilty course of probation from age to age. But for the strength of His intercession, we could not understand the existence of our race: always an unsearchable mystery, it would then have been an utter contradiction to reason. Christ bears up the pillars of our guilty Babel. The world is safe from premature destruction because it is under the shadow of His throne; because, with all its enormous wickedness, it is now Immanuel's land. He is not the minister of sin; but He upholds, by His intercession, a guilty world.

The gospel meanwhile proclaims His dominion. The Redeemer's rights are its message, as much as the mercy of God—a summons to the rebellious, as much as a promise to the guilty. The gospel is still the *gospel of the kingdom*; and the supreme and solitary command that follows the announcement of the text is to *go forth and disciple all nations* to the obedience of the faith.

And this government will secure its own eventual triumph. The race of man shall be saved under the rule of a Redeemer, although a remnant shall be for ever lost. Christ will—for the whole Bible is one divine oath for confirmation to that effect—be absolutely supreme. *We see not yet all things put under Him*; but every knee shall bow, either in submission or repression, and when He shall have put down all *other* power than His own,

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He will resign this kingdom, and the triune God in the unity of the incarnate Son shall be all in all.

2. But these words of Christ have a more direct reference to His *saving authority*, as that is administered for the salvation of individual men.

Christ is in heaven the supreme authority for salvation in all His offices. There is no other name given *under heaven* among men, because there is no other name *in heaven*. There is no god for mankind but God in Christ. He is the Mediator between God and men: as Mediator, He not only hides the penitent believer from judgment, but hides God also from the man that believes not. *Go to my Son!* is still the language of the Eternal. Pass by another way, or seek to find God otherwise than through Christ, and He is indeed *afar off*. All authority to decide the destiny of man is put into His hands. And this authority is distributed over His offices. He is the supreme Lawgiver, High Priest, and King. *Hear Him* is a command that, once heard upon earth, is now always heard from heaven. The terms of salvation are from His lips: we are ruled by a voice, His voice, heard in the scripture, and interpreted by the Holy Ghost. He is the source of grace—a priest for ever to receive our lesser sacrifices of penitent faith, to sprinkle our consciences with the blood of His better sacrifice, and bless us with the benediction of forgiveness and purity of heart. He is the Fountain of all government, the King of saints, and Lord of all.

It is an authority to save every one who trusts in Him and obeys His voice. The obedience of penitent submission is offered at His feet; the obedience of faith is a submission to be saved by His righteousness; and this double obedience of repentance and faith, wrought in the heart by the Holy Ghost, brings personal salvation. And how full that salvation is! *All power is given unto Me.* All authority to pardon the vilest who flies to Him for refuge; all power to renew and sanctify and save those whom no might but omnipotence could restore, and only infinite mercy could look upon; all power to strengthen us in our contests with Satan, the world, and ourselves; to fortify us against temptation, to obtain for us our requests, to enable us to perform our hardest duties, bear our heaviest burdens, and attain our loftiest hopes. *All power* is a word that covers the whole compass of the believer's need for time and for eternity.

To those who reject this authority there is no hope. As great as His mercy is, so great is His holy wrath against those who defy Him, and make their sins His rival. He will *in flaming fire take vengeance upon those who obeyed not His gospel.* He himself will take that vengeance. It is not the wrath of One who silences the mercy of the Redeemer, and vindicates His honour in spite of Himself, but the *wrath of the Lamb.* If you refuse to submit, you are doomed past any future redemption; for out of the same mouth will proceed the

blessing of the obedient and the curse upon those who disobey. This may seem to be forgotten in heaven, because not swiftly confirmed upon earth. Men still rebel, and pass the Redeemer's throne with mockery, as they once passed His cross. But His authority sleeps not though it seems to slumber. Oh wake not the wrath of the Lamb! *Kiss the Son, lest ye perish from the way.* Bow down before His sceptre, lest it become a rod of iron; and begin at once that course of submission which will issue at length in your entire conformity with His law, and His power shall be made perfect in your weakness.

Brethren, the presence of Christ with His church on the mountain in Galilee was the pledge of His presence with us now. Although we see Him not, and hear not His voice, with the eye and ear of sense, let us dismiss our doubts, and fall down before the majesty of His person and of His grace. Let us unite in paying Him our homage, and receiving from Him the benediction of His Spirit. So shall we, thus evermore renewing our consecration from Him, prepare to ascend that hill of the Lord, where we shall be transfigured together with Him, and know for ever all the secrets of His power.

XI.

THE WITNESS OF THE WORD AND OF THE SPIRIT.

ACTS v. 32.

*And we are His witnesses of these things ; and so is
also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to
them that obey Him.*

THE book of the Acts of the Apostles is one continuous testimony to the ascension of Christ. As the gospels contain the record of what Jesus *began* to do and teach until He was taken up, so the Acts contain the record of what He *continued* to do and teach from the hour that the heavens received Him. The day of the ascension is common to both the narratives of St Luke, who was the writer selected to continue the memorial of our Lord's life. The evangelist ends with the hour in which the Lord left the earth, closing His ministry, as He began it, with a benediction. The historian commences his new testimony with the same hour ;

but it is an hour that begins and not ends, which looks forward and not backward ; he does not now dwell upon the *parting from them* so much as upon His *going into heaven*. Our Lord prolongs His days ; and the history of some of the earliest of the new days of the Son of man is contained in this book. These things were written that we might believe in the continued government of Christ ; *the same Jesus*, administering in heaven the dominion which He came down to the earth to secure.

This word of St Peter sums up the witness to the ascension in a more compendious form than any other which we could select. It unites the two testimonies—that of God and that of man—as they are not elsewhere united. It exhibits in the most striking manner the great facts of the Saviour's life of humiliation ending in death, and of the Saviour's death of victory leading to life. Nowhere is the infinite contrast between the abasement and the dignity of the Redeemer more vividly set forth ; nor is the connexion between the two anywhere more clearly announced. Hence this appeal before the council is the highest expression of St Peter's preaching : while the glories of the pentecost and the miracle of the porch invest his former discourses with a certain grandeur that no others can rival, there is no sentence in either of them that equals this for fulness and condensation of import.

Let us consider the testimony of the apostles and the testimony of the Holy Ghost to the ascen-

sion of our Lord, as the end of His course upon earth, as constituting Him a Prince and a Saviour, and as demonstrated by the bestowment of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Ghost bears His witness through the apostles to the historical facts of our Lord's mission, rejection, and exaltation; He reveals through their preaching the grand design of all in His saving supremacy; and He completes His witness in the hearts of those who hear His word.

I. In this appeal we have the sum of the historical testimony to the facts of the gospel. That which the evangelists *wrote* afterwards in full, under the superintendence of the Holy Ghost, the apostles *preach* in the Acts under the inspiration of the same Spirit. Their glad tidings both to Jews and Gentiles are always based upon the gospel-history; varied, indeed, according to the circumstances of their hearers, but always faithful to the three main features of the great outline—the divine mission of Christ, His death upon the cross, and His entrance through the resurrection into the glory of heaven.

1. *The God of our fathers raised up His Son Jesus.* This supreme testimony to the heavenly mission of the Redeemer is uttered by a Jewish apostle for Jews: Simon Peter succeeds, as it were, to his Master's office, and is, so long as we follow him in this book, a *minister of the circumcision*. Jesus, with whom he had companied from the

commencement through the whole course of His manifestation, is, in his preaching, the Promise given to the fathers of the Jewish covenant. The apostle remembers the last injunction *Beginning at Jerusalem*, and it governs the spirit as well as the language of every announcement that he makes. Jerusalem, and especially the council of Jerusalem, yet glorying in the crucifixion, could not receive more than the first principles of the doctrine of the dignity of Christ. Hence the reserve with which the apostle always introduces the holy name. It is not His *Son*—His only-begotten Son—whom God raised up in human nature, but His *servant-Son* whom He raised up of the seed of David, in the line of the prophets; Himself a prophet mighty in deed and work, approved of God, as God's ancient servants were approved, by signs and wonders that God wrought by Him. Hence the entire series of testimonies delivered by the first apostle is confined within the range of Jewish ideas. And the gospel, as proclaimed in the beginning of the Acts, takes up the original strain with which the prophecies of the incarnation made us familiar.

But St Peter did not preach Jesus only for Jews; he preached, like all the apostles, the everlasting gospel, the glad tidings for all people. And his words are so ordered as to bear the higher and broader meaning. The *servant* whom God raised up was not only a descendant of Abraham, and the prophet like unto Moses; He was also the incarnate God-man whom the eternal Father gave to the

world by sending His Son into human nature. He *raised Him up* in a sense that has no parallel or illustration in any other mission. As divine, Christ's goings forth were from everlasting; and His nature had no beginning. As human, He was raised up by a new and peculiar and heavenly generation. As the divine-human Son of God He was born *into* the race, not *of* the race of Adam. And this is the testimony of the Holy Ghost by St Peter and all the apostles. The raising up and sending of the Messiah to the ancient people expands afterwards into the gift of God manifest in the flesh to the whole world. St Paul's sermon in Antioch takes up St Peter's words and gives them the wider application. The Saviour raised up of David's seed unto Israel, He shows to have been the eternal Son preached first unto the elect people, because it *was necessary* in the counsel of the divine will, but, when they put from them the word of God, preached also as the light of the Gentiles, *set for salvation unto the ends of the earth.*

2. The death of Christ is the next great object of evangelical testimony through the Holy Ghost. And here also we mark the specific application to Jewish hearers, to the men whose hands committed the act for which the whole world is responsible: the direct agents in accomplishing the death that redeemed mankind. *Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us*, was the language of the council by the high priest; and it bore witness

to the guilty consciousness of those who slew the Prince of Life, not without a remembrance of the Saviour's words which predicted that the shedding of His *righteous blood* would be the consummate guilt of His own generation. St Peter's words of reply proclaimed the fact of Christ's death as it could be proclaimed only to His actual crucifiers. The same message that offered them pardon painted to them their crime in its most awful colours, and transmitted to posterity the divine estimate of their guilt. They rejected that Just One whom they could not convict of sin; they urged the reluctant Roman to put Him to death; they desired that a murderer rather than Jesus should be given them; they killed the Prince of Life; and, as the sum of all, by wicked hands they crucified and slew Him. Thus their special crime was charged upon them, for their own conviction, and for the justification of God in all the after acts of His providence.

The death of Christ may in a certain sense be called the central theme of new-testament testimony, as declared by human witnesses under the direction of the Holy Ghost. As a fact, with its sad but glorious details, it has the largest place in the record given concerning the Son of God. Here only all the evangelists unite: the other great events of our Lord's history are established by two or three witnesses, but at the cross they all agree in one. And wherever we turn in the later scriptures, the crucifixion is always directly or in-

directly near at hand. As an event it is kept steadily before us : this, however, is a light thing in comparison of the meaning of the event. As a doctrine, the foundation of all doctrine, it ever has the highest place. The *tree* becomes the *cross*; and it is placed in the centre of new-testament theology. From it alone the apostles hear the cry, *It is finished*. While the work of Christ's mission upon earth is the whole sum of truth, the cross is the whole sum of Christ's perfect work. Whether viewed as the scene where His redeeming ministry found its end, or as the altar on which He offered the all-sufficient sacrifice, or as the arena on which He vanquished His enemies and ours, the cross is the glory of His servants' teaching and preaching. It is at the foot of the cross that they behold and survey the whole truth as it is in Jesus : it was there that St Paul said, *we thus judge*, meaning that it directed all the conclusions of his mind, while it constrained all the impulses of his heart. The cross is the centre of their testimony, as no other fact in the redeeming history can be said to be : not the incarnation, not the resurrection, not the ascension, so much as the death, rules and shapes their doctrine. From it radiates all lines, and to it all converge. *One died for all* is the ever-blessed truth that is written in glory on the mercy-seat within the holiest. And this is the testimony of the Holy Ghost. It is not, as many affirm, whose impatience of the cross is as strong as was St Paul's glorying in it, an inven-

tion of modern theology, investing the Divine Being with imaginary terrors and then devising a substitutionary atonement to restore to Him His true attributes. If in this matter we are beside ourselves, it is to God. When we preach an incarnation that prepared for Jesus a body in which to die for the sins of men, we preach not the wisdom of men, but use words which the Holy Ghost teaches : *Lo, I come in the body which Thou hast prepared for me, to do Thy will O my God.* When we preach the resurrection as demonstrating the divinity of Him who died, and who ever liveth to impart the blessings of His death, the Holy Ghost is still our teacher, by many infallible proofs. And when we proclaim the ascension as exhibiting the glory with which our Lord was glorified on the cross, we learn from Him the meaning of our Lord's own word. *We are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost.*

3. The exaltation of the crucified Redeemer closes the series of apostolical testimonies. Once more we mark the influence of his hearers on St Peter's language. Every word is chosen to stamp the contrast between the act of man and the act of God. They slew Him and *hanged him on a tree.* This last word—which St Peter never can forget ; he recurs to it again and again—expressed that uttermost humiliation to which the Saviour had been subjected. *God raised him up* in the glory of the divine perfection in human nature ; *they raised him up* to the tree, the symbol of infamy

and the curse. But another Hand was stretched out to vindicate the glory of His Son, to make reparation for what their wicked hands had done : the right hand of the Father raised Him up again to a dignity that was the measure of His humiliation. We almost seem to hear the Simon Peter of the days before the pentecost, jealous for his Master's honour. But these are not the words of Simon with the too-ready sword. It is the word of God Himself, proclaiming, *vengeance is mine, I will repay* ; but His vengeance is to send down His strong right hand to lift up His Son, that He may be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to those who cast Him out and killed Him.

This is the testimony of the Holy Ghost to all mankind. Here, indeed, it is His testimony in a still more direct sense. The apostles witnessed the manifestation of Christ in the flesh : they beheld His glory full of grace and truth. They witnessed His death and resurrection and ascension. But they witnessed no more : they saw not, though they looked stedfastly into heaven, what passed behind the veil ; nor were the angels of the ascension commissioned to disclose the hidden scene. The solitary messengers declared that Jesus would come again, but this time the multitude of the heavenly host do not announce the new birth into heaven. The Holy Ghost is our supreme and only witness ; and He, throughout the entire new testament, proclaims by His apostles that Jesus ascended to the throne, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty

on high, His incarnate person glorious with the glory that He had with the Father before the world was.

II. The Holy Ghost, by the ministry of the apostles, declares to us the saving supremacy of Christ as our Prince and our Saviour at the right hand of the Father. It was declared by our Lord, when He was about to depart, that the Spirit should glorify Him after His departure; and one part of that office He discharged by giving Him the new names that He acquired by His death. Strictly speaking, He gave Him no new name, but the name which we have known from the beginning; but these titles are given to Him now in a new relation, and with their full significance. Let us view them as separate and as conjoined; we shall then feel the full force of this testimony of the Spirit.

1. In His exaltation, Jesus was made a Prince and a Saviour; and each name is uttered in its own order: first in Himself a Ruler, to us he is a Saviour. He became in His ascension the actual and manifested Prince of His people: their Lord, in a sense that cannot be applied to Him before the exaltation with the Father's right hand. This is the testimony of our inspired guides, uttered in too great a variety of forms to require proof. He whom God *raised up* in our nature was not the Ruler of His people, in the deepest and widest meaning of the word, until He received the heavens.

We know, as He knew, that at the lowest point of His humiliation He was in the bosom of the Father, the Son of God in heaven : that He *came forth* from God as well as *went to* God ; but we also know, by the witness of the Spirit, that God highly exalted Him after and because of the suffering of death. The precise name *Prince* is altogether new when St Peter uses it : here only is it used absolutely, and as a name of the Redeemer. But it must be added to the many other terms that designate the King whom, in the ascension, the Father, according to His ancient decree, set upon His holy hill of Zion. So also He became our Saviour, in the most comprehensive meaning of the name, only when, all His offices complete, he began his mediatorial reign. *His name shall be called Jesus*, said the angel ; and by that name He was always known. *Unto you is born a Saviour*, said the angels ; but we never hear that name given to Him until now. The Jesus of the gospels becomes the Saviour in the acts, in the epistles, and in the church of all ages down to the end of time.

2. But the full significance of this new name is found in the combination. Although the words are distinct, they are united in their virtue. Jesus is the Prince of salvation. He saves those over whom He rules, and He rules over those whom He saves.

He is a Saviour of the subjects of His kingdom, and none are His true subjects who are not delivered by His power from their guilt, from their

subjection to sin, and from the empire of Satan. Whatever other relation He sustains to the world which He has redeemed, and whatever other definitions His kingdom may bear in christian theology and in the language of men, the deepest truth taught by Himself concerning it is, that He rules over the congregation of the saved who experience the power of His grace. This is His own testimony throughout the gospels. There He gathers round His own person, and calls His disciples those whose sins He forgives, and who receive through His word the earnest of the regenerating Spirit. He preaches His doctrine of the church as the kingdom of heaven—the kingdom of God. The whole tenor of His own instructions, from the beginning to the end, is faithful to one idea: the gathering out of the world a people who are saved from their sins. Hence, He never varied His language; but, as He began, so He ended, with the *kingdom of heaven*. This was the burden also of apostolic testimony. St Peter's long discourse proclaims a saving grace that rescues souls from an untoward generation, and adds them to the church as *saved*, or rather as in the process of salvation. And the Holy Ghost everywhere bears the same testimony. The kingdom is still *not of this world*. While all nations are under the Redeemer's authority,—*He is Lord of all*,—His sway as the Prince is over His own elect. He looks down upon the *great house*, which is founded upon the profession of His name, and at the door of which

is baptism, with infinite love, but with love that makes a difference. The foundation on which that house rests is Himself, but the seal of its charter has two inscriptions: *The Lord knoweth them that are His*, and, *Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity*. He is the Prince within this house of David; but His subjects in that house are, in the fullest sense of the word, only those who are *His* because they are *separated from their sins*.

And He is the Ruler over those whom He saves. He has become, says another apostle, borrowing St Peter's words, *the Author, the Prince of salvation to all those who obey Him*. Absolute submission to His authority is the law of His church. This also is the testimony which the Holy Ghost everywhere bears. Our salvation is made perfect, as our Saviour was made perfect, by holy obedience; all its processes, from the first act of submission in repentance up to its consummation in finished holiness, are wrought out through the homage of pure devotion to His holy law. This testimony, added to the former, completes the witness to the Redeemer's lordship in heaven. Those who would with a too liberal teaching prematurely make Him a king over all men alike are rebuked by the declaration, that He is a Prince only as He is a Saviour. Those who would make Him a Saviour, and nothing more, trusting to a grace that works by an invisible decree, are rebuked by the declaration, that He is a Saviour only as

He is a Prince, the Author and Finisher of salvation to those who obey Him. The witness of the Spirit in the word blends inseparably the two great names, and makes both one. What God hath joined let no man put asunder. Our Lord is the Saviour-Prince of His people.

III. The testimony of the Spirit through the word is, lastly, borne to the salvation which our Prince in heaven bestows on man upon earth. And here St Peter, as the organ of the Holy Ghost, preaches the common salvation—to use his own word—in a manner that is by no means common. Some most important elements of truth are declared in this short saying that do not elsewhere appear with equal force, and this makes it one of those utterances the characteristic of which is that they furnish a key to a great portion of other scripture. We cannot but be struck with the two *gifts* on which the emphasis is laid: the gift of repentance and pardon, the gift of the Holy Spirit to confirm the announcement and to bestow both.

1. Jesus in heaven is the Supreme Giver of repentance and pardon. These two great words, when united, express the whole sum of salvation as provided in Christ and proclaimed in His gospel. The former comprises all that is to be wrought in man as preparation; the latter comprises all that man thus prepared receives from Christ's mercy. The two together form the substance of the glad

tidings. They constitute one of the many definitions that in great variety throughout the new testament describe man's recovery. Hence they declare in other terms what the angel commanded the delivered apostles to announce in the temple : *all the words of this life*. The gospel is Christ's gift of repentance, inasmuch as it proclaims the commandment to repent, throws open the way of man's return to God, announces that sin is not by dire necessity the sinner's ruin, and sends him the power from on high, through the Holy Spirit, to abandon his wicked way and his unrighteous thoughts. The gospel is Christ's gift of remission, as it proclaims the atonement by which pardon is secured for the sinner, and justification for the condemned, inasmuch as it announces the one simple condition on which forgiveness is suspended, and promises the blessing to every one who seeks it. On these two great testimonies hang all the revelations of the economy of grace. Hence when St Peter began to preach these words to the heathen, the church at Jerusalem glorified the Saviour's mercy, and said, *Then hath God granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life*. The Redeemer is exalted with the right hand of the Father, to give to the children of men, whether Jews or Gentiles, as the last and best gift of the love of God, the glad tidings of man's repentance accepted and God's pardon bestowed on faith.

2. To these things bear the apostles witness, and so does also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath

given to them that obey Christ. And here comes in the glorious doctrine of the Spirit's testimony, in all its fulness, as it pervades the Scriptures. He pleads the cause of Jesus the Prince, and gives repentance ; He unfolds the treasures of the Saviour's grace, and gives remission.

As the vindicator of Christ's claims, the Holy Ghost bears His testimony not only to those who obey Him, but also to all who hear the preaching of the gospel concerning Christ. When Simon Peter announced the glory and coming of the rejected Redeemer, he felt in himself the power of a mightier advocate than himself, and knew that all who listened to his words felt the same power. This gave him his sublime confidence in the presence of excited multitudes ; and when he stood before that same council, the terror of which had once for a short time overwhelmed his faith, *it was given him in the same hour what he should speak.* And this produced the wonderful effect that followed every one of his appeals. *His adversaries were not able,* according to the Saviour's second assurance, *to resist the power with which he spoke.* None resisted it, none could resist it ; the testimony of the Spirit of Jesus is irresistible. Whether men hear, whether they forbear, they are in both cases *pricked to the heart*, and stand reprov'd before the throne of the exalted Redeemer. And this is the confidence with which the successors of the apostles for ever proclaim the claims of their Master. They also know that the Spirit of con-

viction is with their words, and that His power is made perfect in their weakness. They preach with confidence the terrors of their Master's authority, assured that none of their words fall to the ground, and that His mercy comes behind. They speak as the ambassadors of Christ; themselves often ambassadors in bonds, but fully assured that that greater Ambassador is with them, whose message is not bound.

But the Spirit's testimony to Christ is the gift of a true repentance to those who obey. In the profound mystery of man's freedom there is the awful power to resist the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of a deep and lasting contrition, and of a practical and permanent amendment, although there is no power to resist the beginnings of His strife with the conscience. The arrow with which He pierces the spirit may by wicked hands be removed, and its sacred wound seared over; then conviction becomes obduracy, or takes the Judas-way of remorse and despair. But to those who obey, who yield to the Spirit's secret and heavenly influences through the word, He becomes the Giver of repentance unto life. He condescends to be the Spirit of bondage unto fear, and makes His wards the prisoners of hope. He gives them the worm-wood and the gall, while He promises the cup of salvation. He nourishes the profound sorrow for sin that makes it exceeding sinful. He strengthens the desire and the determination to forsake all evil. He strips, gradually, it may be, but effectually, the

rags of selfrighteousness from the spirit. And evermore He keeps alive the longing for salvation. With the hands of Esau He administers the wholesome severity of godly grief, but, with the voice of Jacob, he still whispers the name that is the sinner's hope.

As the revealer of Christ's mercy, the Spirit is the witness of pardon. He is indeed, as the representative of Christ, glorifying His name and showing His truth to man, the Giver of remission. He enables the penitent soul, brought to the point of perfect self-renunciation, and ready for the look that saves, to behold the Lamb of God. The faith that makes the Redeemer a present, a personal, an infinite reality to the soul, and which can utter the apostle's words, *He loved me and gave Himself for me*, is of the operation of the Holy Ghost. And with His gift He gives Himself. He enters the inmost sanctuary of man's nature—now become a sanctuary indeed—and *witnesses with his spirit* that his sins are blotted out, and that he is accepted in the beloved. This is in very deed the consummation of the office of the Holy Ghost, the end He has in view in all His preparatory ministrations through the word, the beginning from which all His sanctifying influences work. This is His supreme *witness*. As He alone could declare the mystery of Christ raised up in our nature and delivered for our sins, as He alone could testify the glory to which Christ was raised by the right hand of the Father, so He alone can give assurance to

the sinner of the act of forgiveness ratified in heaven for the penitent on earth. And to bear this testimony is His supreme joy ; to maintain it in the soul, clear and undimmed, is His constant promise and pledge. Multitudes of the saved in all ages have rejoiced in this tranquil, sweet, and effectual assurance. Multitudes now live who find in it the answer to all who demand a reason of the hope that is in them, to whom it is a refuge from every perplexity of their own souls and from every assault of the infidel without. They are living *witnesses of these things*, and so is still the *Holy Ghost*, whom God giveth to all who obey Him and comply with the conditions of His gift.

Thus, brethren, we have heard the witness of the word and the witness of the Spirit to the Prince and the Saviour exalted in heaven. We are not now before the council in Jerusalem, but before the throne of Christ. The Holy Ghost this day pleads against us, and pleads with us, the cause of Jesus and the cause of our own souls. He is now willing to receive the first submission of those who have been rebels against the supreme authority of heaven and earth ; and that first submission shall be the beginning of repentance unto life. And to those who are the believing subjects of the Prince of salvation He is ready to impart, and through His word does now impart, the higher gifts that Christ has received for men, the most effectual and inward proof that *He hath ascended on high*.

XII.

CHRIST NOT ASHAMED OF HIS BRETHREN.

HEBREWS II. 11.

For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one : for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.

THE two opening chapters of this epistle are dedicated to the mystery of the incarnation. The first bears its witness to the divinity of the eternal Son. We hear the voice of the Father calling Him God ; and that sublime psalm is appealed to which declares of Christ that, as the creator of all things, He survives in His unchangeable eternity the changing phenomena of created nature. The second dwells, with exhaustive fulness, on the human nature of our Lord, showing the necessity for its assumption, its reality in the possession of all human attributes, and the perfection to which it was raised through death. When the apostle has united the two natures in the incarnate Re-

deemer, he turns the adoring contemplation of his *holy brethren* to the one Person in whom those two natures unite, and bids them *consider*, through the remainder of the epistle, the work accomplished by the mediatorial Godman.

As the central testimony of the first chapter is the voice of the Father, in the second chapter it is the voice of the Son himself which bears the chief witness to the verity of His manhood. As the Father, jealous of His name, did not shrink from calling Him God, so He himself was not ashamed to call man His brother. Let us consider the application of this avowal, with its watchword *not ashamed*, first, in its reference to Christ's assumption of our humanity; and, secondly, in its reference to us who share that nature with Him. He is not ashamed of our nature, which He has magnified and made honourable; and He is not ashamed of those who share the sanctity which He has imparted to it.

I. The Sanctifier and the sanctified are of one nature; and the apostle confirms this great declaration by a voice from the old testament, which he, at least, discerned to be the voice of Christ himself. Meditating on this testimony, in its connexion with the apostle's argument, we may interpret it as asserting our Lord's perfect humanity, as implying His exultation in the work wrought in our nature, and as illustrating the dignity to which that nature has been raised.

1. The Lord is *not ashamed to call us brethren*. There was nothing in the nature He assumed, or in the manner of His assumption, that might cause Him to falter. As He was from eternity very God of very God, divine in all the unqualified attributes of divinity, the express image of His Father's person, so was He man, from His birth of the virgin, in all the unimpaired attributes of humanity, the express image of pure manhood. Omitting the sin of our flesh and blood—which is an accident, an awful accident of our nature, and nothing more—He himself *likewise*, in perfect identity, took part of the same. In the *likeness* of *sinful* flesh, He has our sinless flesh its very self, in its purest integrity, and not in likeness only.

Had He, as heretics ancient and modern assert, omitted any element of our threefold nature of body, soul, and spirit; had His divinity taken the place of the human intellectual soul; had His divine will absorbed and rendered needless His human will; had His essential immortality as God raised Him above the possibility of the severance of soul and body; had His body itself been a mere semblance of flesh and blood, or a new flesh and blood other than that which was formed by God in paradise, and into which He breathed a living soul—then, indeed, He must have shrunk, have faltered, have been *ashamed*, in so unconditional a manner to call us His brethren. But there was no unrevealed secret that forbade Him to do this. He who knows what is in man, gives us His assurance

that there was no flaw to diminish, no superfluous attribute to augment, the pure humanness of His human nature, or to make it other for better or worse than our own. Therefore as, when He descended amongst us, *He thought it not robbery to be equal with God*; so, whilst still in the bosom of the Father, He did not disdain, *He was not ashamed, to call us brethren*. By equal titles, and with equal verity, He is the *Son of God* and the *Son of man*.

2. Not only is this an avowal of perfect oneness with our nature; it implies to the apostle's thought the Lord's rejoicing in the achievement which, through our nature, He was able to accomplish. It was for the suffering of death, in order to the redemption of our race from sin and its restoration to God, that He clothed Himself in our flesh. This was His design, and not merely to bring to it a perfection which it was the eternal purpose that His union with it should confer. This was the primitive purpose, the announcement of which began, or rather anticipated, our history. It was to effect this that He waited for the body prepared for Him in the counsels of eternity, and assumed it in the fulness of time. Because the redemption of our race from sin could not be accomplished save in the nature that had sinned and been taken captive, He was not ashamed to be made a little lower than the angels. He humbled Himself to take part in the children's flesh and blood, because of the great salvation that only in their flesh and blood He could effect. He despised the shame

that abounded, because of the glory that should much more abound to God, and the advantage that should much more abound to man, through the offering of His divine-human sacrifice. *He was not ashamed* faintly indicates His infinite complacency in the instrument without which, be it reverently spoken, even His divine power could not purge our sins. It was as the incarnate Son of God, God manifest in the flesh, that He became the Stronger than the strong man armed, and in His greater strength rescued the human race. *By Himself He purged our sins*; by Himself, the one person in the new strength of His united natures; not as God alone, not as man alone, but by His wonderful Self, the Godman. Hence He was not ashamed of our human nature. He desired it with strong desire before His incarnation; and when incarnate He wrought a work in it which fills eternity with its issues. It is a light thing to say that He was *not ashamed*; our nature equipped Him with strength for the task He came to perform, and in it He *rejoiced as a strong man to run a race*. To reach the Jerusalem to which His face was steadfastly set, He must needs go through the Samaria of our mortal estate; and His way through it was one of the highest triumph mingled with the deepest sorrow. He set the first example of glorying in His own cross. *Father, the hour is come, glorify Thy Son*, was not a prayer for the glorification of heaven alone; it desired also that glory and honour with which, as the apostle here teaches us,

He was crowned in the suffering of death. In bearing our reproach He found His highest dignity ; and the glory of heaven is but a continuation of the glory of the cross.

3. The final honour put upon our nature gives these words their best illustration. The body of Christ, which had been dishonoured and marred, was restored to its perfection and glorified. He who was not ashamed of His alliance with us when on earth, because of the wonderful thing He would accomplish in our midst, has given the highest proof of His regard to our flesh and blood by raising it to supreme dignity in heaven. Whether it might have been possible for Him to lay aside that panoply of our nature in which He spoiled the spoiler and led captivity captive, whether having saved mankind He might have ceased to be man, is a question that He has for ever rendered needless. He is still not ashamed to call us *brethren*. Again, we say, this is a light word. The Redeemer rejoices in His present possession of our nature—if we gather up the testimonies of scripture—with a peculiar joy. He has presented it for glorification, or rather (for the Father's acts are in the unity of the holy trinity His own) He has glorified it Himself. He made it His tabernacle on earth, it is His temple in heaven, the throne of His eternal inhabitation. He has clothed Himself with our nature as with a garment ; but it is a garment of which He will never be unclothed. His rent flesh has been healed ; and this vesture, unlike that

of the changing universe of visible things, shall never be *folded and laid aside*. He is our Elder Brother, or rather our Supreme Head, for ever and ever. The name which is verily *above every name* is now Immanuel—*God with us*. Other names that He has borne are more or less transitory, historical, official: Prophet, Priest, and King—yea, even Jesus the Christ itself—may pass away when these functions are discharged and ended, to be treasured only in the eternal memory of the glorified Church. But Immanuel, the name that shines upon the first page of the new testament, and then is for a season seen and heard no more, reserved for a distant service, shall survive all others and abide for ever.

To sum up all. As these words of the apostle were used by him, they assign to our Lord an estimate of His human nature which is not limited to His manifestation in the world. The expression refers to a voice heard in the old testament before Christ took our flesh; and it illustrates its own meaning by reference to the Redeemer's sentiment as still retained in His heavenly glory. He declares His humanity to be essentially that of man, as indeed it could not be otherwise; He rejoices in the work achieved in our flesh and blood; and His glorification is the final expression of that feeling.

Let us now turn to the application of these words in their bearing on ourselves, on those *brethren* of whom they are spoken. For, it is not only of our nature that Christ is not ashamed, but

of His sanctified people who bear it. Who, then, are they? and what do the words imply when referred to them? and what response do they demand?

It is only of the new congregation of the sanctified that He is not ashamed. This separates them from others, and at the same time describes their own true character.

1. Not all men as such are acknowledged by Christ. He is not, indeed, ashamed of our nature; but of part of those who bear it He is ashamed. It is true that His love—the love of a divine-human kinship—goes out towards every son and daughter of Adam; His intercession remembers all, even as His blood atoned for all. But all men are not christian brethren because He shares their nature. The race is not regenerate because He redeemed the race. He limiteth a certain portion; the objects of His complacency are here said to be those to whom He reveals the Father's name, who are sanctified, and who form a new family of which He himself is the centre.

They have received the *revelation of the Father's name*: having been brought to a sense of their apostasy and ruin, they have been invited back to the Father's house, and have received through faith in Christ the adoption of sons. The declaration of the Father's name is not the simple announcement to all men that they are the children of God, but the invitation to all men to become the children of God. Those who know the Father as reconciled are the *church in the midst of*

which the Redeemer utters His good pleasure. Of them it is specifically that He is *not ashamed*. They are *becoming sanctified*. Receiving the Spirit of the Son of God made man as the Spirit of adoption, they are renewed in their nature and become one with Christ. Their gradual sanctification is their gradual conformity to His image; into which—the *same* image—they all are changed from glory to glory. They are therefore a new race; composed of those who have had power given them to become the Sons of God by receiving the Spirit of the eternal Son incarnate. They are the sanctified, the *holy brethren*, of whom Christ is *not ashamed*. And in the midst of these as a new household it is also that the Lord declares His present and abiding satisfaction. He is, according to the prophecy of the wicked Caiaphas, —not knowing what he said, while he uttered beautiful words—*gathering together* through the virtue of His death the true *children of God scattered abroad*. There are the *many sons* whom, out of the mass of mankind, He is ever and always *bringing to glory*. These are the household of faith of which He, the second Adam, is the Head. These are the kindred, who do the will of God, and whom, renouncing all mere natural kinship, He acknowledges. These are the children over whose faith He now rejoices as given Him of the Father, and whom, when their number is complete, He will present as such at the great consummation.

Of all others He will be ashamed ; and in so many words declares that He will disavow them at the last day. *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His.* Let us beware, therefore, how we trust in Christ's relation to our race, without being members of His new mankind. What He will say to those who never heard of Him we know not yet. But let none who hear His claims think they have part in this fellowship, until they become one spirit as well as one flesh with Him.

2. But to those who belong to His new family, this word is full of consolation. It is one of those remarkable expressions which seem designedly to suppress half their own meaning : hinting a boundless depth. We can hardly exaggerate their tenderness and the fulness of their promise.

1. They express the Redeemer's unlimited joy in those whom He gathers out of the world. *Not ashamed* is a gentle way of declaring His boundless delight in them. The very word *brethren* betokens perfect confidence and love ; it is one that makes all other appellations comparatively cold : hence, though scarcely ever used before the cross, it burst at once from the Saviour's lips when the sorrows of death were over : Go, tell *my brethren*. The quotation to which the text appeals carries us back to the pathetic crucifixion psalm, in the midst of which we hear a song in the night : *In the midst of my brethren I will sing praise unto Thee.* We cannot fail to be reminded also of that

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scene where, after having distributed His woes, the Redeemer rejoiced in spirit over the babes who had received His revelation of the Father. *Our* Elder Brother, unlike him in the parable, rejoices over the multitudes of prodigals He brings back. Let us whom He has sought and found rejoice with Him over our own recovered souls; but *calling Him Lord*, with holy gratitude, while He is *not ashamed to call us brethren*.

2. The word has an impressive illustration also in the care which Christ, as our Brother, takes of our interests. We are His household, over which He is *faithful in all things*: for us He was faithful unto death upon earth, and over us He is faithful in heaven, in constant intercession and effectual grace. The first time He used the word was when He said that He was going to His Father and ours: exalted with the oil of gladness above His fellows, He pledged Himself that He would never forget or be ashamed of them in their low estate; and amply has He redeemed, and is still redeeming, that silent pledge.

It is His never-failing object in heaven to maintain our cause, and take care of our interests. All the love borne to Himself He will have placed to our account. Before we become His brethren in the real and higher sense, He pleads for us His own merit, and secures for us forbearance, pardon, and peace. But when we become His true brethren, spiritually bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, there is nothing—not indeed to the half, but to the

whole of His kingdom—too good for His desire towards us.

Joseph, that younger brother of ancient time, was the faint but beautiful type of our elder Brother in heaven. He has provided for us a better Goshen in this world, and left among us the memorial of *His will* and of His prayer, that we might be with Him in the next. He yearns over us with infinite pity and love; and, as they see who behold Him behind the veil, does not refrain Himself. He holds the kingdom of heaven for us; nor counts Himself perfect until we are sharers of His dignity. Meanwhile, He sends us ceaseless tokens from above that He remembers us. The angel-ministers who sustained Him in His agony on earth are made ministering spirits to the humblest of His brethren. All things are theirs, because they are His. His heart is with the children of men, who through Him have become partakers of a heavenly calling. While on the throne of heaven, and receiving the homage of principalities and powers, He is in our midst, listening to our worship, sympathising with our sorrows, and in unnumbered ways showing that He is *not ashamed to call us brethren*.

3. The word further indicates the sympathy or community of lot which exists between the elder Brother and the brethren of His house. The very term is in scripture selected for this idea, and carries the sentiment with it in our common language: *the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren throughout the world*. We may view this under

two aspects: He condescends still to be the Brother of our lot, and is not ashamed to make us the brethren of His own.

In all our afflictions He is afflicted; and, not the angel of His presence, but His presence itself, is with us. Our struggles, our temptations, our persecutions are all His: *Why persecutest thou Me?* He has gone up to heaven rich in the infinite experience of man's capacity to be tempted and to suffer: knowing all that, without sin, He could know. And in the mystery of His sympathy it is as if He came back to take every disciple's burden upon Himself, and go through every suffering christian's experience with him.

So there is nothing more constantly dwelt upon in the new testament than that our christianity is the brotherhood and fellowship of our Saviour's destiny. *If we suffer with Him, we shall reign with Him; if we die with Him, we shall live with Him*, is still a faithful saying. In a certain sense we are all brethren of the cross, dying daily with Him to sin; certainly brethren of His passion, suffering with Him that we may enter into His glory. The Captain of our salvation was thus made perfect, and we must not enter some other way. We are brethren of His conflict with Satan; ever carrying on His conflict with a discomfited but still malignant foe. We are brethren of His work; carrying out His designs for man's salvation. And if we enter into the fellowship of His passion and toil on earth—still *with*

Him in all His temptations—He will appoint to us kingdoms in His great empire, and then as now not *be ashamed to call us brethren.*

4. Another most gracious illustration of the word is to be found in our Lord's tolerance of the infirmities that might well make Him ashamed even of the best of His brethren. What, after all, is the character of His new congregation,—I will not say of the visible church, with its half-saved world within it, but the mystical body itself, the sanctified? Alas, how deeply unworthy of His condescension! How amazing the love that makes Him not ashamed of you and me! But it is not matter simply of love. Whatever charity may do in man, love in God cannot *cover the multitude of sins.* The Lord is still the jealous God, who cannot look upon sin with any allowance. The expiation of the cross has not lessened in His eyes the abominableness of sin. His soul still hateth iniquity in every form, and if possible most of all in those who bear His image. How, then, is it that He is not ashamed to call them brethren?

Because He is sanctifying them! They are under the tolerance of mercy that rejoices against judgment,—not *over* judgment, but *over against it*,—making lesser judgments do the work of His mercy. He hath finished redemption for us, but He is still carrying on sanctification within us. He bears with our infirmities, for they are passing away; and, while we tolerate them not in ourselves, He will have patience with us. He keeps the strict jus-

tice of law waiting until the righteousness of the law shall be fulfilled in us: *have patience with them, and they shall pay thee all.* If the holy angels muse over the disparity between the Head whose perfection they see, and the members to whose imperfections they minister, they make no comment. Satan marks it, and makes his comment; but, as when he pleaded against Joshua, he is *rebuked of the Lord.* Sometimes the Saviour himself points to the wounds got in the house of His friends; but He is patiently perfecting His church one by one, and, waiting for His people's perfection, does not disdain to acknowledge them as His own.

5. Lastly, He is not ashamed to call us brethren, because of what He has prepared for us in eternity. We cannot but be reminded of another saying in this Epistle: He is *not ashamed to be called their God, because He hath prepared for them a city.* The God of the pilgrim race apologises, as it were, for their present degradation; the city prepared will vindicate Him and them. So here the Captain of our salvation is not ashamed to call us brethren, because He hath provided for us in the other world a destiny worthy of His relationship to us. His brethren's lot is not yet such as becomes that relation. Those who are with Him in paradise are still far below the consummation of His will concerning them. Those of them who are on earth are wrestling with infirmity, temptation, and all the sad preliminaries of death. Although not in bondage through fear of death

itself, they succumb to his power, and part of them remains a prey to the last. Our Head liveth for ever, but we die. His body is glorified, our bodies see corruption; nevertheless He is *not ashamed*. The time is coming when He will enforce from death his spoil, and present to the Father the children given Him, without the smell of fire though all the work of fire has been done; and, because of that transcendent compensation, He is *not ashamed*, in our intermediate and humbled state, *to call us brethren*.

3. What then should be our response to our Lord? Of the many thoughts that arise, it may be enough to dwell upon these. How should we glory in Him who is not ashamed of us! How should we rejoice in this dignity, and all its boundless prerogatives! How anxious should we be to walk worthy of it!

How great is our dignity in our new Head and elder Brother! Lost as the descendants of the first Adam, and degraded by our bondage to sin and infirmity, living in sorrow and hasting to die, we have nothing of our own to glory in. But, finding the secret of our shame, we know also the secret of our dignity. We see ourselves subject to vanity; but we see Jesus, our Representative, exalted, and we are exalted in Him. Hence He should have the full strength of our devotion, gratitude, and love. As He is not ashamed of us, so should we not be ashamed of Him, but count His name our only glory. Take heed, brethren,

how you trust. Secure are we in Him who are His; but upon all who are not His, and upon all who wilfully reject Him, His eternal displeasure shall rest. If you are not among the brethren whom He acknowledges, delay not till He has given you His Spirit, and can rejoice in your salvation.

How strong may be our confidence and security in Him! There is no limit to the privilege and prerogative implied in His calling us brethren. Our Joseph has all the treasures of Egypt for His brethren in Goshen; and another Pharaoh will never arise that knows Him not. We cannot ask Him too much, nor can we expect too much from His grace. *If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed*: enlarge the word to its uttermost, and you cannot exaggerate its force. Before this saying men's cold and narrow views of religious privilege must retire. *The Sanctifier and those who are sanctified are all of one*: whatever we could give Him, without sin, He took; whatever He can give us, without His Divine essence, we may ask for and have. The children given Him of the Father are not only joint-heirs with Him of God; they are also joint-partakers of Himself. All that He has is ours. *Father, I will that those Thou hast given Me be with Me*, is a request to God, but to us an unlimited and inexhaustible promise.

How anxious should we be, finally, to walk worthy of Him who is not ashamed of us! This ought to be our most effectual restraint from sin, the mightiest incentive to holiness of life. If we are

rightly touched with a sense of His infinite condescension in giving us His name, and tolerating our infirmity, we shall abhor the thought of adding to the reproach which He still bears, or of abusing His forbearance to licentiousness. Who that thinks of His brotherly love aright could bear to *wound Him in the house of His friends?* But that is not all. He calls us brethren, and by that name stimulates our desire to be like Him unto perfection. The ceaseless ambition of those who love Him, is to make the text true in all its depth and fulness of meaning,—*He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are one*: one with no difference for love to sigh over; of one mind, one heart, one will; one in holiness, one in happiness, one in heaven, with Him the elder Brother; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all glory for ever. Amen.

XIII.

NOT UNTO THE WORLD.

JOHN XIV. 22, 23, 14.

Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

NOTHING is more impressive in the Gospels than the record they give of the gradual lifting of the veil from our Saviour's person and work. He, and His words concerning Himself, were throughout a mystery to His disciples. From Mary, the depositary of the first secret, down to the humblest of His companions, all alike pondered deeply, *Who art Thou?* and mused *what His words should mean.* Sometimes they asked, sometimes they feared to

ask Him ; but always and to the end, or almost the end, the veil remained *untaken away*. Only removed by the Holy Ghost after His departure, it was most graciously uplifted by Himself to some extent as He approached His cross, and especially on the eve of His passion.

On that last evening the mystery grew most intense ; the time was pressing ; and what they asked they must *ask quickly*. Hence, three disciples, whose voices we seldom or never hear in the Gospels, yield to the irrepressible impulse, and interrupt at its outset the flow of the sublimest discourse that ever fell upon mortal ears. The first betrays his amazement at the Lord's departure ; the second demands impetuously the supreme satisfaction of the vision of God ; the third is baffled by the manner of Christ's revelation of His future self. There is a profound unity in these three questions, and the Lord's reply to the last is the key to the whole. They are questions of infinite moment to every one of us ; they touch a mystery that we all feel. Never were the apostles more entirely our representatives—the representatives of our ignorance and of our desire—than when they thus unbosomed their souls. Who does not look wonderingly whither Christ has gone, and muse upon the way ? Who does not make Philip's deep request his own, *Show us the Father ?* And who is not supremely interested in Jude's inquiry, and the Lord's reply, *How dost Thou manifest Thyself to us, and not unto the world ?*

I. The question of St Jude may be viewed under two aspects, according as it is regarded as springing from one or other of two sources of error. It was, on the one hand, connected with a mistaken notion of the external character of Christ's kingdom, and, on the other, it revealed an entire confusion as to its internal character. Or, still better, it mistook the nature of His revelation to the world, and it was ignorant of the nature of His revelation to His people.

I. The most obvious meaning of the apostle's question will be seen if we follow the workings of his mind under the influence of His master's strange words. When the Redeemer spoke so emphatically of coming back again, after His departure, to manifest Himself to His disciples, Jude was amazed to hear the outer world so utterly forgotten. What, he thought to himself, can have occurred to change the plans of God and His Christ? Did not the prophets teach that the *law should go forth from Zion*, and that the nations should say, *Let us go up to the house of the Lord*? Have we not heard of the songs of angels and men at the incarnation announcing a ruler over all people? proclaiming a Saviour who should be the manifested *glory* of Israel, and shed His fainter *light* upon the Gentiles? But now both Israel and the Gentiles seem forgotten; the manifestation is to be unto *us*, and unto us only as individual believers, sincere and obedient. It must be remembered that Jude was probably one of those brethren of Jesus who,

at an earlier period, and not yet truly believing, appealed to Him in the spirit of this very principle, *If Thou do these things, show Thyself to the world.* The sentiment is strong within him still ; hence, while others muse and keep silence, he yields to the strong impulse, and even takes courage from the others to interrupt the Lord with the words, *What has come to pass that Thou wilt manifest Thyself to us, and not unto the world ?* What has taken place to change the counsel of God and Thy own purpose towards men ?

This error concerning the internal manifestation of Christ's kingdom has lingered on to this day. We still hear it asking in ignorance, and ignorantly answering its own questions.

Judaism has always protested, and still protests, against a Messiah who has retired into the spiritual world. To its blinded mind the notion is still a contradiction to the prophetic word : the heavens must *not* receive Him till the restitution of all things. *Yet wait they for another*, who will sit in Zion on a visible throne. Millennarianism within the christian church has, from the very beginning, caught up and echoed the question of the ascension-day : *Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel ?* Not content with the Lord's reply, and impatient at His long absence, it indulges its fancy in vain depicturings of a revelation of Christ to the world which will begin in earnest the work of the gospel, and do what this spiritual government will never achieve : the result being

too often what may be styled no better than a sacred christian mythology. Infidelity or rationalism stumbles at the same offence of Christ's withdrawal from the world. We speak not now of the blank infidelity which rejects the christian dispensation, but of the rationalism which in various forms assumes that Christ's dominion among men is only that of the doctrine He preached. This spirit will not receive the notion of a Saviour who rules invisibly from above. The ascension is its offence, and it would fain constrain us to give up our Lord's divinity in heaven, which has a God already, and make Him a king among the religious prophets whose kingdom the world can see and appreciate. Romanism also asks and answers the question in its own way. It makes the Redeemer show Himself to the world by His vicar and other self, and presents Him in all its ordinances, not spiritually only but visibly, as a manifestation to the eyes and touch of men. And, while these various forms of error express more grossly the misconception of the apostle, the same spirit too often infects Christ's humble servants of the purest faith, and betrays itself in their scarcely-concealed impatience at the slowness of His advent. *How is it that Thou dost so long manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?*

2. The question must also be studied as betraying, not simply misapprehension, but ignorance of the manner of Christ's revelation to His own. Again, we may attempt to follow the work-

ings of the apostle's mind. Remembering all that Jesus had formerly said as to His being *in the midst* of His disciples after His departure, he supposed that the Lord here promised to come back to them in occasional, secret, and precious manifestations of His presence ; like and yet unlike those revelations of Himself which Jehovah had anciently vouchsafed to His elect servants ; or like those appearances of Christ which actually did brighten, by mysterious visits, the gloom and suspense of the forty days. Of a spiritual revelation of His presence and power within the heart, Jude as yet understood nothing. In common with the other apostles, though perhaps with less presentiment than some of them, he knew Christ only *after the flesh*. Whatever impressions they had all received of the majesty of His person, the spirituality of His words, and His knowledge of their hearts, they had not yet learned to regard Him as more than a superior in their midst. The revealer of God within their hearts, they knew not. The discourse which was to flow on in the declaration of this truth, Jude, the third interlocutor, here interrupts. *Lord, what is it?* he asked, in his impatience ; while all were musing, *We cannot tell what He saith.*

Let us transfer this question, the question of honest desire, to ourselves, and carry it to our Lord for His reply.

The question is one that all are asking who have any regard for the authority of Jesus. But it is

put by various persons in a very different spirit. Many there are, to whom these closing chapters of our Lord's teaching are a sealed book, who answer the question for themselves. To them there is no unspeakable mystery in Christ's revelation of Himself to man, they are content with believing that He left a perfect human example and wholesome words of doctrine, in which, and in which alone, He exerts His influence : *commending Himself to every man's conscience*, like His apostle, *by the manifestation of His truth*, and in no other way. As the Jews had Moses and the prophets, whom they were to hear, so christians have Jesus and the Scriptures, and nothing more. Others there are who are theoretically more sound as to the mystery of Christ, but are equally impatient of what they call the enthusiasm of internal revelations. But let it be our wisdom to put Jude's question to Christ, and wait for His answer. It is a question of infinite moment to each and to all. What is the supreme Revealer's revelation of God ? What are the conditions on which He suspends His internal manifestation to the soul ? How does the King of saints govern His people's hearts ? What difference does He put between them and the world ? If Christ be all that we believe Him to be, no inquiry that may agitate the human mind can be more important than this. And when, with Philip, we say, *Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us*, we are constrained to add, *Show us Thyself, and it sufficeth us*.

II. Most refreshing it is to turn from the poor questionings of man to the clear utterances of Him who answers all our questions out of the fulness of His wisdom and love. His answer here is perfect and sufficing ; but let us mark how it is given.

Jude, the inquirer, is responded to ; but his question is only met in an oblique manner. It was an interruption, and the Lord, without specifically answering it, takes it up into the thread of His discourse. His reply is intended for us all. He speaks to the whole congregation of His people. Never was it more fully true, *What I say unto you I say unto all* ; hence the marked emphasis on the words, *If any man*. The answer pervades the entire discourse, which thenceforward flows on without any interruption, save that which the Lord's own straitened spirit once presents. They durst not ask Him any more questions ; and they needed not, for sentence after sentence brought before their minds the substance of all things new and old. But His words required the later interpretation of that Holy Spirit concerning whom He spoke. The disciples themselves did not as yet understand His words : witness their subsequent abandonment of Him, and, after forty days of instruction, their ascension-question in its hopelessness. We cannot, indeed, understand the seeming inefficiency of their master's teaching, unless we bear in mind that they had not yet the great interpreter. And, lastly, His reply takes for us three forms. First, He dwells upon the spiritual manifestation of Himself that was

to follow the end of His visible intercourse with them, a spiritual revelation of the holy trinity in the soul. Then He points out the personal condition of internal obedience on which this manifestation should be suspended. And, lastly, He teaches that this internal revelation should one day be consummated in another, when His presence should be visible again, though not in Jude's sense, to the world.

1. The manifestation of Jesus is the Spirit's revelation to the soul of the holy trinity in the work of Christ.

The divine Spirit is here announced as the final interpreter of Christ's ministry. As John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus, so Jesus, in a certain sense, is the forerunner of the Spirit ; but with this immeasurable difference, that He whom the Lord announces as *to come*, and already *in their midst*, was *not* greater than Himself. His glory is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, and He glorifies the Lord whom He reveals. He makes known within the spirit of man what Christ has done for the world.

He makes the Redeemer in all His offices a personal and internal Saviour. He speaks the Ephphatha to the hearing ear, and guides the disciple, whom He teaches, by a secret instruction that never fails, into the knowledge of Christ's doctrine. He reveals the high-priestly office of the Redeemer, by inspiring the penitent faith that comes to Him for mercy ; He rolls away the clouds from the cross

as the stone was rolled from the sepulchre ; through His influence the sinner, sprinkled from his guilt, receives the atonement, and can say, in the assurance of the inner man, *He loved me and gave Himself for me* ; and He sets up within the consecrated heart the kingly authority of Christ, making Him absolute Lord in that domain where He takes most pleasure in His dominion, the inner world of man's spiritual nature.

Hence, once more, the revelation of Christ is the internal revelation of the three-one God. The discourse with which our Lord takes leave of His church below, is not so much a farewell discourse as a final disclosure of the mediatorial trinity. The Father *liveth* in the Son ; the Son *cometh* with the Father ; the Spirit *abideth* in the unity of both Father and Son for ever. These words, however, are used interchangeably. The holy trinity in redemption, as in the eternal mystery of essence, is one Lord ; and the final design of Christ's work in the world is to make the inmost nature of the believer the shrine of the divine indwelling, even as the church universal is in another sense His temple. Thus, while we speak of the several functions of the divine economy in Christ's perfected kingdom of grace, it still remains true that even already *God is all in all*.

This being so, we must not forget that the manifestation of the holy trinity is by us to be understood and experienced as personal communion with Christ. The soul becomes the habitation of

God through the spirit, inasmuch as all the blessings of the Triune God in redemption enter, and sway, and sanctify the soul. But this profound mystery is brought nearer to our apprehension, and made more influential in our hearts, when we regard it as represented by the control of Jesus over our spiritual being. The time is not come, when, in the strictest sense, *God is all in all*: we are Christ's disciples, and can in this life know no other God than is revealed in Jesus. As He is the supreme governor of the world until the last day, and all authority is put into His hands, so is He, during our life of probation, all in all to our individual souls. And the manifestation of the Triune God to the spirit of man—a manifestation which in another state will be the common blessing of heavenly consciousness—must now be understood as the revelation of Jesus to the spirit, bringing Him as distinctly before our soul's eye as He was visibly before the bodily eye of the disciples, and much more abidingly and satisfyingly near to us than He was to them.

2. Our Lord suspends the revelation of Himself in the kingdom of grace on the personal obedience of love to His commands. This condition regulates His manifestation to His own, and it explains His denial of Himself to the world.

The christian is here supposed to have submitted to the Lord's authority. A manifestation of His claims as the mediatorial Redeemer has already, through the Spirit, produced repentance,

and by the same Spirit His power as a Saviour has been known. Then follows the internal revelation to obedience. A relation most sacred, intimate, and sanctifying is established between the Lord and the individual soul that loves Him. That relation is here expressed by a term reserved for this last discourse : *I will manifest myself to him.* This means nothing less than, on the Lord's part, the clear disclosure of Himself; and on the believer's, a clear and satisfying vision of Christ that leaves no room for doubt, or fear, or uncertainty. But here it is the condition that we must strive fully to understand. The servant of Christ *hath His words*; there is no commandment of Christ that is concealed from him, and His commandments are committed to the guardianship and obedience of *love* : *He it is that loveth me.* In proportion to the depth and purity and perfection of the disciple's loving obedience, is the fulness and perfection of Christ's manifestation. Upon his simple obedience to all the Lord's will, the Lord sheds all the light and glory of His presence. If there are degrees of this revelation, they are regulated by the degree of the obedience. If the spirit of the believer is beclouded, and mourns the withdrawal of His Lord's favour, it is because he falters in some point of his duty; let the cause of the obscuration be removed, and the light of the Lord's countenance returns with the same certainty that the sun shines out when the cloud is gone. In the spirit where love has but one solicitude, *to do His will,*

the bright shining of His light leaves *no part dark*.

Here let us pause to ask ourselves whether our religion answers to this description. We cannot learn better than from Christ himself what the relation of the christian to Himself should be. And here He declares it without reserve. On other subjects He might seem to speak *in parables*, here He *shows us plainly* what our privilege is. Lest it might be supposed that He spoke of His apostles only, He says, most emphatically, changing the phrase on purpose: *If any man—I will manifest myself to him*. Then why is your view of Christ so indistinct and unsatisfying? Why do you behold the things of Christ with the uncertain vision of him who, half healed, sees *men as trees walking*? Whosoever you are whose case is thus, the reason is not in Christ, but in yourself. You lack a complete and full and unquestioning obedience. Offer Him that as a penitent, and His love shall soon be shed abroad in your heart. Offer Him that as a believer, through the divine Spirit, and your last doubt shall soon vanish, as his did, who, after long despondency and disobedience to the word of truth, was enabled at last to cry, *My Lord and my God!*

Hence Jude's question is answered, *How is it that Thou wilt not manifest Thyself to the world?* The world is self-excluded from this high privilege. *It seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him*, because His authority is rejected, and the voice of the Spirit

pleading for Him is refused. This is always declared to be the secret of the gulf fixed between the Redeemer and the mass of mankind : *The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.* But here the separation between Christ and the soul is a personal one ; the Saviour's complaint mourns over *him that loveth Him not*, and therefore *keepeth not His word.* This lamentation, especially when regarded as an answer, however indirect, to Jude's question, implies that the Lord is baffled in His desire to reveal Himself to the soul sitting in darkness, and alienated from Him by sin. It declares that the want of love and obedience which forbids His fellowship springs, on the sinner's part, from a refusal to submit to His authority, a refusal which is also a rebellion against the authority of the Father ! *The words which I speak are not mine, but the Father's which sent me.* Whatever difficulties may beset the question as to man's ability to receive the truth of Christ when presented to him, and as to his responsibility for rejecting it, the Saviour's testimony is here most emphatic. And it is all the more emphatic when we give heed to the tone of inexpressible sadness with which this slight put upon His mercy is referred to. It is as if the Lord would ask His servant Jude another question : How can there be any revelation of my favour and kindness where the Spirit of my grace is rejected, and not suffered to shed my love abroad in the heart ? It reminds us of words spoken not long before in the fulness of pathetic remonstrance :

Ye will not come to me that ye may have life! And still more of that declaration which closes the Saviour's appeals in Scripture: *Behold I stand at the door and knock*—I have stood, still am standing, and will a little longer stand—*if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him.*

If any man love me not, is language which does more than give an explanation. It is one of those indirect appeals which the Redeemer so often makes to those who harden their hearts against the persuasion of His never-ceasing self-sacrifice and love. Spoken in the hearing of the impenitent man, after the consummation of the cross, it has in it an infinite pathos of reproach and grief. It has no more than this. But St Paul gives it more. In those most awful words of his abjuration, he might seem to be first echoing the Lord's words, and then filling up their fearful meaning: *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha. The Lord cometh* is common to Christ and His apostle. Let him who hears this saying, and knows that the Lord's boundless love has awakened no response as yet in his own heart, make haste to seek a better mind, lest the Saviour come to him, or send for him, and find that His last resources of grace have been exhausted in vain, and dismiss him to that doom which love shall never mitigate.

3. Once more, our Lord here teaches us that His manifestation to His people will not always be through the Spirit alone, but will one day be both

spiritual and external. This further element in His teaching must not be omitted, as it sprang directly from the question of the text and the circumstances of the occasion. It will be found also, by a careful observation, to pervade the entire discourse.

The manifestation of Himself, which Jesus promised to His servants' love and obedience, was promised for the *little while* of His absence from them. It is a presence which is consistent with absence; and it is declared to be only temporary and limited to His disciples' probation, or to the interval until His coming again at the last day. Hence it is now a revelation through the Holy Ghost, whom the Saviour sends from the Father to be His own representative and deputy, but whom in that capacity He will one day supersede: *I will receive you to myself*. Hence also it is a manifestation to faith, to faith resting upon the word, strengthened by ordinances, and working by the energy of love that for ever hopes to be with the Lord himself. *We walk by faith, not by sight*, is not an intimation that faith is better than sight, but the reverse. Now we see Jesus through the medium of the mirror of ordinances, then we shall *see Him as He is*. The intervention of the Spirit, the means of grace, the conditions of obedience, shall pass away for ever; and the Lord's manifestation shall be at once the perfection of revelation to the inner spirit, and of revelation to the outer sense. Hence the suggestive order of the two

great prophecies of the ascension. After the forty days had weaned the disciples from the Lord's personal presence, He closes all by bidding them wait for the *promise of the Father*. But no sooner has He entered heaven than the angels supplement that great promise by another: *This same Jesus shall come again, even as ye have seen Him go into heaven.*

That final manifestation will be in the fullest sense *to the world*, with a deeper meaning than Jude gave his words. The heavens *must receive Him*, but only until the restitution of all things. When the set time shall come, when the times and the seasons appointed of the Father shall have revolved, the Lord will appear in glory; and then *every eye shall see Him* without distinction of persons. All the kindreds of the earth shall behold Him, either to wail because they *pierced Him*, not to their own healing, and have lost Him for ever, or to welcome Him as their eternal desire. But to the world as such He will then appear not as a saviour, but as a ruler, to execute the last act of authority in judgment, and consign them to eternal justice. They would not receive His love, and keep His commandments while the acceptable day lasted; now they must hear a last word which it will be past their power to disobey. And with that last word—fixing the great gulf for ever between Him and them—His revelation to the world will cease. But to His people He will be manifest for ever. They shall be *with Him where He is*, and *behold His glory*. Of the *where* of the manifesta-

tion this discourse says nothing ; of the manifestation itself it says all that heart could desire : *I will receive you unto myself.* He will still, and throughout eternity, hold His throne in their glorified spirits, while He will for ever reign in glory in their midst. Whatever other mediatorial functions He may abdicate, this He will never resign.

Blessed, then, are they who have this *hope in Him*, and therefore *purify themselves as He is pure.* Blessed is he—for the whole of this discourse is a personal matter—whose secret joy is the thought of an eternal union with Christ, for ever visible again, and for ever beheld in His glory. To him the Redeemer is *manifest* now : he sees Him to the satisfaction of his soul, released by that vision from guilt, from fear, from the bondage of sin, and from the snares of the world. And yet the burden of his song is : *I behold Him, but not nigh ; I see Him, but afar off.* There is no purer sentiment than that which combines the active zeal of obedience in the present life with the ardent hope of release from the duties of probation into the presence of Christ. Let us each one hold fast this christian confidence, in spite of the mockery of the world, never more intolerant of the church's living hope than now. And then, when we have been long enough walking by faith, He will lift the veil that hides Himself and paradise—the lifting of that veil men call death—and will *manifest Himself to us* for ever.

XIV.

THE MEDIATOR IN HIS CHURCH.

MATT. XVIII. 20.

*Where two or three are gathered together in my name,
there am I in the midst of them.*

THE promise here uttered by the Redeemer in the midst of His apostles assumes, when interpreted by the light of the future, the force of an absolute decree, enjoining the new worship of the church which He was about to found, and pronouncing upon it prospectively an endless benediction. The *new* worship: for it silently intimates that the old is ready to vanish away. The temple where the name of Jehovah had been enshrined is already regarded as closed. Another temple, not made with hands, was to be reared of regenerated souls, the building and worshippers being one: where was to be enshrined another name, *which is not another*, but only a new manifestation of the same Triune God who had been worshipped from the

beginning. In this better sanctuary no veil was to interpose between the people and their God : *There am I in the midst of them.* The new *worship* : for this ordinance does not abolish, but enjoins, the formal assembling of the future church. The name is still recorded in a *place* chosen, and of that place the ancient promise holds good : *There I will meet you and bless you.* The congregating of the people is as imperative under the new as under the old economy ; the worship of God and the edification of man were to lose nothing in the transfer ; the sacrificial service was still to go on, though with a richer and deeper meaning ; and whatever change was to be introduced should be only gain : *There am I in the midst of them.*

Let us then consider this primitive charter of christian worship, which prescribes the gathering of the people unto the name of Jesus, and promises His abiding presence in their midst.

I. The centre of the christian assembly is the person of the Redeemer : they meet *in* His name, to avow and confirm their common faith in Him ; they worship *through* His name, as the sole mediator of their religious services ; they gather *around* His name, as the head of a confession that must win the world.

1. The christian community is a company of persons who are one in the common bond of faith in the name of Jesus. According to the scriptural idea of christian fellowship, that faith is the trust

of penitent souls in the only name given under heaven whereby men may be saved. It is a living faith, inwrought by the Holy Ghost, that unites them to Christ as a living head, and makes them partakers of His pardoning and regenerating grace. Receiving individually the seal of their acceptance in the beloved, of their separation from the world, and of their admission into the family of God, they unite collectively to avow their faith before men. In this they obey the injunction of their master, who builds His church on the confession of His name by living witnesses of its power: ordaining that baptism should be the primary seal of that confession, the sacramental communion its occasional and most solemn confirmation, and all the meetings of believers its habitual expression. Faith in His name is the living bond of a living church.

This, brethren, is the fundamental principle of christian fellowship; to this it behoves us continually to revert. It is true that the reality around us does not always accord with this ideal. The congregations that assemble in the name of Jesus are not composed of true believers alone. Multitudes baptized in their infancy have not entered into their christian privileges, though they have not renounced the christian profession. Multitudes have failed to redeem the pledges of their first devotion, and utter the holy name with unholy lips. Multitudes are found in the christian assemblies to whom the religion of Christ has never been more than an external form. Many there are, too, who are only learning

the way of faith, and join in christian worship as probationers for its full assurance and final experience. But, with every deduction, the truth remains, that the soul of all church communion is the joyful avowal of the common salvation through faith in the common name, which every believer makes his own in the confidence of appropriating trust.

2. But the christian assembly is an assembly of worshippers, who present their worship *through* the one name of Jesus as the mediator between God and men. As the mediator in heaven, He renders human service acceptable; as the mediator on earth, He orders the details of that service according to His own will.

(1.) The full meaning of *in my name* was not disclosed when the promise was first given. The disciples knew not as yet the mystery of the Lord's high-priestly office; they knew not, until He had finished His work of atonement, that access to heaven was to be opened by His intercession. For this great truth He gradually prepared their minds. Here first He intimated to them that His name would be the foundation of christian worship. And from this time forward until His departure, He gave them more and more plainly to understand that their prayers should be heard and answered for His sake and through His authority. But it was not until the heavens had received Him, and His intercessory office began at the right hand of the Father, that they fully knew the virtue of His

all-prevalent name as the mediator between God and men.

It is the indispensable law of christian worship, that it be offered through the name of Jesus. Christianity has brought to light the mystery hid from ages and generations, that only through a mediator, presenting an atoning sacrifice, is the divine being accessible to man. As it declared to the heathen that *unknown God* to whom their altars were ignorantly dedicated, so it declared to the Jews that *unknown mediator* through whom they ignorantly worshipped. It is the glory of the christian congregation to approach a revealed God through a revealed intercessor ; we know not only *whom we worship*, but also *through whom we worship Him*. These our visible houses of prayer are but the outer and as yet distant courts of a temple, over which a high priest presides, who for ever receives our offerings of prayer and praise, and secures their acceptance with our Father in heaven.

(2.) The mediatorship of Christ is not confined to the heavenly places. He is the master of our assemblies on earth also ; and, as such, regulates and orders all our acceptable worship. As Moses, the lesser mediator in the typical house, was faithful in the administration of its religious offices, so Christ, the greater mediator, is faithful in the administration of the service of His living house, the church. He is present with us in spirit,—not, as St Paul, in imagination, but by the agency of His own Holy Spirit,—directing the ordinances of our

worship according to the pattern which He has Himself shown us in His word.

We may regard this mediatorial regulation of the christian service under three aspects.

First, He has abolished and withdrawn from His house of prayer that which in the *earthly sanctuary* was typical, temporary, provisional. His own accomplished sacrifice once offered, and never to be repeated, has rendered needless the altar, the priesthood, the shedding of blood, and the variety of ceremonial oblation. *In my name* displaces all, and reduces to pure and blessed simplicity the communion between God and man ; substituting the *heavenly things themselves* for the *earthly patterns of the things in the heavens*. And with the fading away of the typical service, the house in which it was offered has vanished also ; left desolate by the departure of the true Shekinah, it was then laid utterly waste ; but is now reproduced in countless houses of christian prayer, *wherein two or three are gathered together*, in every part of the earth.

Secondly, and more particularly, Our Lord has given positive institutes of worship, which are as binding on His people as the abolished ceremonies of the temple were upon the Jews. There are still *ordinances of divine service*, though there is no longer a *worldly sanctuary*. He has provided for the maintenance of His worship by the appointment of a christian ministry and pastorate, chosen, qualified, and continued in never-ending succession by the Holy Spirit. He has commanded the assem-

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bling of christians together for the worship of the Triune God in hymns and spiritual songs ; for the offering of prayers, supplications, intercessions, and thanksgivings ; for the celebration of the Eucharist ; for hearing His holy word read and expounded ; and for every other purpose of religious devotion and charity. He has re-consecrated the ancient Sabbath for the commemoration of the finished work ; hallowing it, not so much by express enactment, as by the grace of His own presence and personal benediction upon it, when He rose from the dead. And it was in the prospect of all these observances in the future of His church, when the withdrawal of His bodily presence should give form to the service of faith, that He uttered these words, *where two or three are gathered together in my name.*

This saying of our Lord, as interpreted by the Holy Ghost in the history of the early church, assumes that the religious life of christians is a fellowship that must have its outward expression. It altogether disavows the notion, always more or less prevalent, that union with the visible body of Christ's followers is comparatively of little moment. The whole tenor of the new testament runs contrary to this. It is true that religion is a personal matter ; and that our Saviour, in His first precept concerning prayer, bids us enter our closet and pray to the Father who seeth in secret. In that silent and hidden sanctuary of our own hearts—where the solitary worshipper is alone with his God—He would have us learn the first lesson of

our devotion, and there keep up its constant strength. But He does not command us to tarry there ; He never teaches that the individual worshipper is to find his way to the general assembly in heaven through a path of solitary and separate devotion. Even in that earliest injunction He put the *Our Father* into His disciples' lips ; and His latest ordinances regard them as a community united by the strongest bond that can bind the hearts of men, always rejoicing in each other's fellowship, and separating daily only to meet again.

But the spirit of our Lord's words is equally repugnant to an opposite extreme,—that of those who exaggerate the mystery of christian communion, practically limiting the presence of Christ, and the saving influence of His presence, to certain assemblies and ordinances of an exclusive church. The name of the one only mediator is the bond of fellowship everywhere ; and, where that name is truly invoked, according to the simple terms of communion that He in His supreme authority has established, there He *receives the congregation*. It is not an altar, it is not a priesthood, transmitted in the order of their course from generation to generation, it is not a sacrificial ritual, or any ritual at all, that constitutes the guarantee of His acceptance of the assembly, but the presence of His name, and person, and spirit. Nor is this sanctifying grace limited to the place which He *chooses to put His name there* : His mediatorial presence is

everywhere with His people, whose relation to Him does not absolutely depend upon their visible gathering to Him. Those who assemble *unto* His name bring the virtue of their grace with them, and carry it with them wherever they go. They meet publicly in the name that is privately precious to each. Let us, then, brethren, see to it that we do not confine our religion to the public ordinances of Christ's church.

Thirdly, The Mediator of our christian assembly has been pleased to commit much of the order and detail of the public service, as it regards its place, time, and circumstance, to the discretion of His people. Provided His few positive enactments and fixed institutions are duly honoured, He leaves the rest to the free spirit of our christian devotion. While He accepts the house dedicated to His name, He is not limited to the courts of any building made with hands. *Where two or three are gathered together in His name, there am I*, is a pledge that He does not confine Himself to the great congregation, assembled in their fullest number and for their most complete service, but graciously condescends to shed the glory and grace of His presence upon the little companies of His servants who *speak often one to another*, for common edification and common prayer, in divers places and at occasional times. While all things are done *decently and in order*, He accepts everywhere and at all times our service. If we approve ourselves jealous of the honour of His holy day, His word and sacrament, and His own ap-

pointed ordinances, He will honour our subordinate appointments of time and place for observing these ordinances. *Where two or three*, is a word of large latitude : it pledges its promise to every order of our gatherings, from the smallest family circle, through all the variety of our social meetings, up to the church united around the word and table of the Lord.

3. To complete our view of the christian assembly we must regard it as meeting *around* the name of Jesus as the head of a witnessing church, whose office it is to bring the whole earth to His allegiance. This gives a distinguishing character to the congregation of Christ's worshippers. It never meets without an ulterior reference to the spread of His kingdom : wherever the two or three are gathered together to avow their own faith in Christ, and to solemnise their worship through His mediation, their purpose is also to advance the honour of the name of Jesus by adding to their own number and the number of those who profess that name.

Hence every christian assembly is a company of Christ's servants meeting to renew their pledges of loyalty and devotion to His sacred cause. They are worshippers in the name of Jesus, who are under the most solemn vows to do their utmost to bring others to accept his mediation. Their worship has not attained its end in itself : this they wait for in heaven, where alone pledges of active service will be lost in eternal adoration. In this world they have a religion which they must spread

as well as enjoy. And it is the very law of the christian assembly around the name of Jesus that it exists to diffuse that name. Every congregation, even the smallest, has a silent ambition to convert the world ; and never breaks up without new vows of consecration to the King in Zion, who is to be the accepted Lord of all the earth.

Hence the prominence given in our assemblies to the preaching of the gospel of salvation. There are not many meetings of Christ's people into which all men are not allowed and even invited to enter. Some there are, indeed, which are in their very nature limited to those who are by their profession the living heart of the church ; and it would be an unmixed evil, were the disciples of Jesus not to have a *garden inclosed* and a *fountain sealed*. But to the general assemblies of the church all are admitted, and no test, either of faith or of character, is applied. This by many is counted an evil, and we have lately heard it asserted to be the bane of christian worship. But our defence is drawn from the unlimited charity of the gospel, and the imperative obligations of christian devotion. Every assembly has the conversion of all its members at heart ; and surely it is not without the full sanction of Christ when His word of salvation is preached in the midst of it to those who are still unsaved. Pure worship of God, with simple exposition of His mind and will to regenerate hearts, is a beautiful ideal ; but it is an ideal that the state of mankind will only to a limited extent admit. If

Christ is in the midst of His people—His people, and Christ with them, are in the midst of a perishing world.

And there are assemblies of christians around the name of Jesus in which the personal profession, and the offering of religious worship are entirely subordinate to that ultimate end—the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom upon earth. How many are the schemes of christian charity and benevolence to the bodies and souls of men, to the miserable at home and the heathen abroad, in furtherance of which christians gather together! And every such meeting, whether on a smaller or a larger scale—whether taking the form of a great congregation or of a committee for counsel and deliberation, is no less an assembly *in the name of Jesus* than those which professedly meet for christian worship. Of this we may be well assured, that, when our Saviour uttered the saying of our text, He meant not to restrict His promise to meetings held for express communion with Himself; He contemplated in the glorious future of christian activity all the innumerable enterprises in which His name should enlist the charities of His people. We cannot be too careful to avoid entertaining an opposite illusion. We never are more truly gathered around Him—the eternal source of charity to man; never are we more surely met in His name—never are we more secure of His presence and sanction in the midst of us, than when we meet to consult rather for His interests than our own—

rather to promote the good of others than to seek our own blessing.

We may extend this application still farther. There is no meeting of the christian church for any purpose connected with its discipline, regulation, and prosperous fellowship that is not an assembly in the name of Jesus. The obligation to do all in that name rests upon the community as well as upon the individual. Our Saviour speaks of His disciples as gathered in His name to deal with an offending brother; and St Paul represents the church as assembled *in the name of Jesus*, to cast out an impenitent christian. There is no purpose of administration, in all its wide variety, and down to its most common detail, that has not the same dread sanction. And as this truth gives dignity to all the meetings, more public and more private, of the christian church, so it imposes on us the duty of attending them in the spirit of reverent devotion and zeal. Let us always remember, brethren, on the numberless occasions on which our ecclesiastical polity requires us to assemble in the service of the church, that its divine head is always present by His spirit, disdaining no object, however seemingly trivial, which unites two or three of His disciples in His name.

II. The presence of Christ in the assemblies of His people for ever, is here for the first time promised; and the language of the promise is so simple in its sublimity, that we can hardly miss its

full depth of meaning. *I am in the midst* is the very voice of God throughout the old-testament scriptures ; and, as used by our Saviour here, it is the assurance of nothing less than a divine presence in the church. It is also the promise of the incarnate Jesus, that He himself, in His human sympathy and mediatorial offices, would ever continue among His disciples, even when removed from their sight. And when He says *In the midst*, He teaches us to expect the equal effusion of His grace upon all who surround Him.

1. Every word in this first christian promise declares that He who speaks is God. Jehovah, the eternal *I Am*, chose formerly a place, to put His *name* there ; and always was pleased to declare that He dwelt *in the midst* of His people. From the first revelation of that awful name by Moses, through the whole range of the ancient scriptures, down to Zephaniah's last word, *The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty*, these are the sacred phrases that declared the union between God and His people. The Redeemer would never have used that long consecrated and inviolable language, had He been less than divine ; *It is the voice of a God, and not of a man*. *I am* in the midst, not, *I will be*, or, *I will come* ; but, in the full significance of the term that knows no change, *I am*. Hence our Lord declares, rather than promises, an abiding and necessary presence among His people, as that of God dwelling in His new temple ; the eternal Son, in the unity of the Father, and of the Holy Ghost, in-

habiting, sanctifying, and glorifying the new house of His glory, the christian church.

Hence the Mediator, through whom we worship, is Himself the object of our worship. Though the christian service is presented to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Ghost, we never scruple to *call upon* the name of the Lord Jesus Christ ; nor deem that we give the glory of God to another, when we honour the Son as we honour the Father, remembering who hath said, *My name is in Him.*

Let this truth teach us, brethren, the sanctity of our assemblies in the house of prayer. The place whereon we stand is holy ground ; not because it is a sacred building, but because of the awful presence in it. Let the thought that we are gathering around the invisible person of your God-made man inspire our hearts with reverence whenever we enter these gates, and for whatsoever purpose of devotion we enter. Let us strive to cultivate the spirit of adoration until it become a law. There is much danger of our failing in this ; partly because His presence is invisible, and there are no symbols in our simple worship to present it to our minds ; and partly because of our habitual familiarity with holy services, in which the sacred name is continually on our lips.

2. While we assert the divine prerogative of our Lord, as the eternal *I Am*, in His temple, we must not forget that He speaks as Jesus of Nazareth, who promises to be in the midst of the congregation of those whom He is not ashamed to call His

brethren. The angel-ministers of the ascension told the disciples that the same Jesus should be seen by them returning, as they had seen Him go into the heavens. But their master had already spoken a better word than that : He had given them the assurance that He would not leave them comfortless, but come unto them, not less really and actually Himself than if they beheld Him with their eyes. This He spake of the Holy Ghost, through whose agency, as the Spirit of the mediatorial dispensation, He continues all His offices in the midst of His people. His glorified human nature is in heaven, awaiting a set time to return : till then, it is by the influence of the third person of the trinity that He manifests Himself to believers. It was thus that the Lord afterwards explained the words of His first promise.

But that earlier promise would never have been left on record if it had not been the Saviour's purpose to encourage in our hearts the feeling that we have ever in our midst the invisible God-man, whose humanity brings God near to us, and is so essential to our human hearts. We must not let the later explanation take from us the letter of the original text. We must not doubt, but steadfastly believe, that *the same Jesus*, whose presence as a teacher, as a saviour, and as a master, was the joy of the disciples before His ascension, is by His spirit still present, teaching us that fuller truth which He reserved from them, conferring that more entire salvation which His death alone brought

in, and exercising that more absolute authority which He attained in His resurrection. St Paul's interpretation of the ancient Psalm belongs to the pentecostal church, and not alone to the earlier days : *He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee.* Here the two great mediatorial offices are declared to be still fulfilled by Jesus in the midst of His church. He is, on the one hand, the revealer of God unto us ; declaring His name as the God of mercy through the atonement, preaching by His word and through His servants the terms of the common salvation, imparting those blessings to those who repent and believe the gospel of the grace of God, and unfolding the mysteries of the Father's will to the regenerate minds of His brethren. All this He does as the ever-present prophet-king of the christian church, gathered around His person to hear the oracles of heaven. On the other hand, He is the representative of His brethren's worship ; leading their prayers and devotions, giving virtue and the prerogative of sure acceptance to their supplications, making their songs, as it were, His own, and thus presenting their service in His own name to the Father. All this He does as the ever-present priest-king of the christian church, gathered around His person to send up to heaven the worship of earth. The incarnate mediator is not shut up in the heavens, though the heavens have received Him. We do

not wait until *the coming of our Lord* for our gathering together unto Him. *There am I in the midst of them.*

Let it be our study, brethren, in our assemblies for christian worship, reverently to realise the presence of Jesus, the Son of man. Our imagination need not be too busy in depicting any human form;—like the ancient worshippers, *we have seen no manner of similitude* of our heavenly master;—but let our faith be strong in the actual nearness of Him *whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.* Let us cherish the thought that when we enter these gates *we are come to Jesus*, and draw nearer than we are wont to Him; that when we hear His word, it is spoken to us by Himself; that when we speak often one to another concerning His goodness, He hearkens and hears; that He is near in all His human sympathy to minister His grace to our infirmity; that His hand is present to give us the bread and the wine, and to bless us with every variety of benediction. In this we derogate not from the dignity of the Holy Ghost, whose honour it is in the christian dispensation to *take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us.* *He shall glorify me*, was the Lord's prophecy and promise; while the Father glorifies His incarnate Son in heaven, the Spirit of Jesus glorifies Him on earth in the midst of His brethren.

3. There is yet one more word in this original

promise upon which we may profitably linger : *In the midst.* This gives us no new or additional meaning in our Saviour's declaration, but it suggests the most gracious reflections on the Redeemer's nearness to us, on the diffusiveness of His grace in our religious meetings, and on the freedom with which each is admitted to his own portion in that grace.

The veil is done away in Christ. God was anciently in the midst of His people : symbolically and really dear to them, whithersoever they went, while the ark of His covenant was in their possession. The earlier lawgiver could touchingly appeal to that fact as the strongest argument for their gratitude and devotion : *What people hath God so near unto them ?* But God in Christ is in the midst of us in a sense in which God behind the dense curtain was not in the midst of Israel. It is true He is still hidden from our sight, but to our faith the veil is already done away. Between us and Him there intervenes no priestly mediator ; nor does He declare His presence, as in former times, at fixed intervals and amidst dread solemnities, to one in behalf of all. He does not require that we regard Him as a far-distant mediator, interceding for us within the veil, while we await in trembling uncertainty the issue of our prayers. He makes the holiest of all accessible to the faith of His people ; and, by being Himself in our midst, brings our lower and unworthy assembly into direct communion with the very court of heaven. Jacob's

night is turned into day ; and the antitype of Jacob's ladder, on which the angels of God ascended and descended, is our Saviour Christ, uniting heaven and earth by His presence in the midst of His praying saints.

It speaks also of a grace diffusive. Those closing strains of the old testament belonged rather to the new than the old economy : *The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; . . . He will joy over thee with singing.* Salvation is shed from the presence of Christ upon all who reject not His influence. That virtue which went forth from Him when the crowds surrounded Him, and which healed them all, was typical of the diffusive grace which still and for ever radiates from His sacred person. None enter the christian assembly without being more or less sensible of its influence, although many learn to resist its mysterious appeals to their heart. It touches and moves upon all ; but it enters, and enlightens, and comforts, and saves those only whose souls rejoice to give it access. They feel His presence as the power of a present blessing ; and hence *a present blessing* becomes the watchword of their meetings : a word mocked by the profane, pitied as enthusiasm by the sober ceremonialist, condemned as presumption by the too diffident worshipper to whom the incarnate elder brother of the church is no other than the union of a *jealous God* and an *austere man*, but inexpressibly precious to the simple believers in the

very promise of Christ. They know that He is in the midst, by tokens of divine influence that could proceed only from Himself. To them His own word is fulfilled, for He *manifests Himself* unto them. The elevating, inspiring effect of His word assures them that it is He who speaks it to their hearts; the consciousness of renewed pardon, giving them rest from all their doubts, tells them that He forgives their sins; consolation for their sorrow, deliverance from their besetments, direction in their difficulties, revival for their languor, and ever new inspirations of love and hope and joy, all conspire to give full assurance of a presence to their faith even better than would be a presence to their sight; and they never come to the *gathering of His people unto Him*, in simple, childlike reliance on the truth of His promise to be in the midst, without being constrained, like the converted worshipper of St Paul, to confess that God is in the midst, or, like St John on that morning of the resurrection season, to say to their own hearts, *It is the Lord*.

Lastly, the word suggests the individual privileges of believers as sharing a common blessing. Our Lord in the midst of His people is the *same Lord unto all who call upon Him*: in the most affecting fulness of its meaning, the common Lord of a common salvation. What the sun and the rain of God's providence are to His creatures as such,—impartial in their distribution of good,—the mediator of God's grace is to His saved people. He is in the midst, alike accessible to all, equally accessible to

each. He is the centre, from whom flows out grace to the most distant, and to whom the most distant may, if he will, come near. It is true that He still uses instruments in the impartation of His blessing: He still *gives to the disciples, that they may give to the multitude.* But the blessing itself is in no hands but His own; and He distributes it to each severally as He will. He wills that every one shall come to Him, and shall have according to his faith. Come, then, now, and come always, for your own portion; not fearing that any will step in before you, intercept the Lord from your eyes, or be counted worthier than yourself. Remember always your personal, inalienable privilege to be as near to Christ as any other believer, to be as near to Him as it is your *desire* to be. For every one who comes to the Lord with Simon Peter's individual confession of faith and love, *Thou art the Christ*, shall hear Simon Peter's personal benediction, *Blessed art thou!*

XV.

GLORYING IN THE LORD.

I COR. I. 29, 30, 31.

That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption : that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

THE order of these three verses is in itself most suggestive. Christ, in the fulness of His saving grace, is in the middle ; on the one side of Him is man, stripped of his glory and reduced to impotence ; on the other side is man with his strength retrieved, glorying in the Lord. St Paul leads our race up to the cross, where every human boast is confounded. He bids the sinner put the shoes from off his feet, and the crown from his head, and own the nothingness of his best estate. He then shows him that in Christ crucified his crown

of wisdom and righteousness is restored, and sends him on his way rejoicing in the recovery of all, and more than all, that he had lost. But St Paul is only the minister of the Holy Ghost, the guardian of the cross, and the interpreter of the things of Christ. It is He who teaches us here the lesson of our glorying lost, and our glorying regained; and it is His influence alone that can make the teaching effectual. His aid, then, let us devoutly seek, while we consider His servant's words, that He may lead us up to this better than Pilate's superscription over the cross, and help us to read it in perfect self-renunciation, and send us from it with the christian's full rejoicing in our hearts and upon our lips.

I. In the presence of Christ crucified *no flesh shall glory.*

The text winds up a discourse in which the apostle has been detecting and seeking to abase the spirit of pride in his Corinthian converts. That was the secret of their danger: enriched with gifts bestowed upon them with more than the ordinary liberality of the Spirit, they were *puffed up in their fleshly mind.* Their internal divisions, evil in themselves, were chiefly evil as indicating a disposition to glorify man at the expense of the simplicity of the gospel and the honour of the jealous God. Hence the ruling aim of the introduction to the epistle: man at his best, whether of wisdom or goodness or strength, absolutely nothing;

God in Christ all in all. This is the strain which is dilated upon in every possible variation ; a strain which we may best interpret by reducing the whole to three aspects of man's abasement in the presence of the cross. Christ's death is in itself the dread revelation of man's sin and ruin ; it is a divine expedient for salvation, that owed nothing to man, and utterly baffled human calculation and reasoning ; and its efficacy is imparted to the sinner in a way which humbles him to the lowest point, and robs self of all its glorying.

1. The cross is the revelation of the measure of our ruin as a race. Christ crucified as the bearer of human sin, and the sacrifice for a guilty world, not only endured our penalty, but also, in enduring it, exhibited in His own person our shame. In Himself immaculate, spotless in His own sanctity, and never more glorious in holiness than in His perfect self-sacrifice, He was lifted up nevertheless as the representative of our sin, and became, in the language of Scripture, what, without that supreme authority, we should not dare to utter, *a curse for us*. While reverence shrinks from the expression of the awful truth, the truth of the glorious gospel it still remains, despite the reluctance of human theory or sentiment, that Jesus on His cross summed up in Himself all that man's sinfulness offered to the exaction and doom of holy justice. The words of Pilate, when he led forth the sacred Sufferer, words which, like Caiaphas, he spoke without understanding their depth of mean-

ing, the Holy Spirit expounds to us when that Sufferer is lifted up to endure the sentence upon sin: *Behold the man!* Here is the tremendous issue of the violation of God's holy law. *Lord,* sang the humble psalmist, *what is man that thou art mindful of him, the son of man that thou visitest him?* Thus he expressed his sense of the essential feebleness of mankind under the canopy of God's boundless universe. But man, in Christ upon the cross, is exhibited under the canopy of heaven, not feeble only, but oppressed by sin, and by transgression sundered from God. *Lord, what is man?* has there an interpretation that we dare not dwell upon: human nature, in the person of the holy Sufferer, hangs between heaven and earth, as it were disavowed of both, the mark of the Almighty's arrows: *shoot, and spare not, for he hath sinned!* Who that muses on the psalmist's word, *The son of man that thou visitest him,* but must think of that visitation upon the divine Son of man which made inquisition to the uttermost for human transgression? Here is man that God made in holiness reduced to his worst estate! Here, after long ages, is man's dread forfeiture of his crown and glory expounded.

Once more, our reverence demands that we pause and make the great distinction. He who thus represented in Himself our sin and curse, never ceased to be the beloved Son of God, in whom He was well pleased. Above the deepest darkness and apparent desertion of the Saviour's humbled

estate there was ever the transfiguration glory, though not seen by man. Our sin and shame and curse were, in the unfathomable mystery of redemption, His by imputation only—not otherwise than by imputation ; yet by such an imputation as must make us approach the cross to behold the exceeding sinfulness of our sin. *No flesh can glory in the presence of Him who expiates our offences in the likeness of our sinful flesh.*

2. The same cross, however, is God's method of saving from the sin it reveals. Christ, by His great undertaking, accomplished there, and of which there only he could say *It is finished*, was made unto us the all-sufficient source of wisdom, the meritorious and procuring cause of justification and holiness, and the power of full and final redemption. But, in whatever light we view His work, it robs man effectually of all glorying in himself.

The divine method of salvation is altogether of *God*, and upon this the apostle lays stress, when he would strip man of his complacency. Although we are not saved without our own co-operation, the plan of redemption, in virtue of which our salvation is possible, owes nothing to us. It originated in the eternal counsel on our behalf before we had our being ; and it was the intervention of a divine Saviour, given to our nature, and sent unmasked into the world, made *for us*, made *unto us*, all that the necessities of our lost condition demanded. We contributed nothing but our

desperate need, our sins were our all, and our redemption was of the pure grace of God. The Redeemer did not ally Himself to us, or to any representative of our race, and help us to redeem ourselves. He took our nature, the sinless nature that we had lost, and in it saved us by *the right hand of His own power*. Had He only joined Himself to us, and shown us by His example how to become holy, and aided us to attain our own deliverance, there might have been some slight ground for complacency in ourselves. We might have exulted in the revelation made of our own resources, as appealed to and stimulated by His effectual encouragement. Glorifying in Him, we might have also paid an undertone of tribute to ourselves. But it was not so. We were lost, utterly lost. A new Head was raised up for us; the resources of a new and alien strength saved us. Christ was *made unto us* wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

It is only a slight variation of the same thought when St Paul proves the futility of man's glorying by an appeal to the vanity of his utmost efforts before the revelation of Christ. The strain of the entire chapter is the discomfiture of all merely human endeavours. It pleased God, in the wisdom of His unfathomable counsel, to suffer the world to make its best experiment before He disclosed His eternal secret. And what was the result? We hear the clear and confident challenge of the apostle: *where is the scribe, the keeper of the*

earlier divine revelation? *where is the disputer of this world* and its best philosophy? *where is the wise*, whether of Jew or Gentile? The Jews were the inheritors of the holy oracles which announced a coming redemption, but the dispensation under which they had lived could not effect that redemption; and the later scribes, who forgot its prophetic design, and sought to make that which was only a schoolmaster unto Christ a substitute for Christ Himself, are constrained to confess, if not in words, yet by their impotence to deliver man from the bondage of sin, that their system was at best a failure. The Greeks had been for ages the representatives of the highest merely human philosophy. School after school had flourished; what mortal ethics could do had been done for human regeneration, and the highest mortal teaching had been expended on the mystery of the relation between God and man. But all had been in vain. The result was a hopeless negation. Their best philosopher was a questioner who could not solve his own doubts, their sternest discipline could not cast out sin, their loftiest speculations were but dreams, and, after ages of learning, *man by wisdom knew not God*. St Paul's challenge is universal. Like Elijah on Carmel, but without the mocking, he convicts the world's false prophets of utter impotence. And now *the mid-day was past*, and their prophesying during the forenoon of the world had awakened *no voice, nor any to answer*. *The time of the offering of the evening sacrifice* had

come, and God reveals His own amazing secret. Before its revelation on the cross all human glorying was confounded and lost.

And when that secret is revealed, it abases and baffles human reasoning by its mystery. It is a divine expedient, which is not only above the thought of man's heart, but which repels his proud reason so long as it glories in itself. Like Jesus, its author and finisher, it is an offence to the carnal mind. The preachers and interpreters of the cross do not urge its acceptance upon the intellect until they have commended it to the sinner's heart. They calmly assume that it must needs be foolishness to the independent reason, and that no wisdom of words will affect its demonstration to the mind of man. That God should become man, and by His own blood redeem the race from its sin against Himself, is that great mystery of godliness which transcends, while it does not contradict, human reason, and takes away all its glorying. To the Jews, blinded by their carnal expectations to a truth which any page of their oracles should have prepared them to accept, it was a *stumblingblock*; to the Greeks, blinded by their own dialectics, it was only *foolishness*; and to all in every age who require that the atonement shall satisfy their intellect before it delivers its message to their hearts, it must ever be shrouded in darkness. That was the apostle Paul's last word always to his generation; and we are not better than our fathers. The mind of man has received

no accession of strength : the progress of ages has solved a multitude of questions since, but has obtained no new light on this ; nor has the offence of the cross ceased. Ten thousand instructors have expounded the philosophy of redemption, but it is still a spiritual truth spiritually-discerned. God incarnate, One bearing the burden of all, man partaker of the divine nature : *here is mystery*—the ancient, unchanged, ever-blessed mystery, that takes their crown from the princes of this world's intellect. The cross is the sign of the Son of man upon earth, and it is ever spoken against while man glories in the flesh. He may plead against it with his reasoning, and wag his head beneath it in his contempt ; but there it still stands, the reproach of man, the glory of God.

3. Lastly, the appropriation of the blessings of Christ's redeeming work takes away the glorying of the flesh. Here also the apostle is very bold, and utters plain words, as clear as they are emphatic. Utter self-renunciation, simple faith in Another, and both wrought by divine grace, are the terms that sum up his teaching.

That no flesh should glory in His presence has here a personal application. As the great confession of its impotence was enforced from the world, so now the apostle brings the individual sinner to the cross and bids him forsake all trust in himself. He must confess that he has no wisdom to guide his soul, no righteousness and sanctification with which to make himself meet for the divine presence, no

redemption within the resources of his own nature. But in saying that, the half only is spoken. It is a light thing that the sinner must confess that these things are not in him. He must also sink down before the Lord in the sense of utter ignorance, and guilt, and pollution, and bondage to sin. The Holy Spirit, the guardian of the cross, while infinitely willing to shed its mystery of love abroad in the heart, is inexorable in this requirement. Christ is of none effect, and the virtue of His atonement cannot be known, until every other hope is renounced, and the penitent feels that he deserves no hope at all, that he is a sinner, and only a sinner, in the presence of his Judge. He must not only forsake all that he hath, but confess all that he is, before he can win Christ. Then, when his heart is dead to the faintest throb of self-complacency, his conscience alive to the keen sense of sin, and his mouth stopped in self-despair, he is ready for his new life in Christ. But not till then.

And his salvation further takes his own glorying away, as it is given to simple faith in the free gift of God by another than himself. Purchased for him at an infinite cost, he must submit—yes, submit—to receive it without money and without price of his own. All the words of this text, and each in particular, converge to this truth. The prime secret has been spoken before : Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God *to them that believe*. And here that simple trust in Christ is

represented, not as the instrument by which man attains, but as the condition on which God imparts, the blessings of grace. Of Him *we are* in Christ Jesus ; our very being is a new birth from nothing and less than nothing. He is *made unto us wisdom*, not by correcting our errors and aiding our judgment, but by giving to us the whole sum of gospel truth. He is *made unto us righteousness and sanctification*, not by elevating our repentance into a true expiation, and helping us to wash and be clean, but by furnishing to us an infinite atonement as the ground of our justification, and His own Spirit of holiness to renew and perfect our nature. He is *made unto us redemption*, not by assisting our feeble endeavours to burst the fetters of sin and vanquish death and the curse, not by teaching our hands to war and our fingers to fight, but by giving Himself a ransom for all, and beginning a deliverance in time that will be perfect in eternity. Here all human glorying is excluded ; we have nothing in our redemption, as in our creation, that we did not receive. Touching our salvation that saying does not hold good, that a man must have *his glorying in himself and not in another*. To *another* we owe our all : to One who, in the most profound sense, is yet *not another*.

And lest any should glory in that very faith itself which receives all, even that also, and the preaching and hearing through which it comes, is robbed of merit. The preaching of the gospel is itself foolishness in this respect, as the great preacher is

most anxious to declare : it owes it efficacy to the demonstration of the Spirit. The conviction of sin and the silent humiliation of the soul are His work. And *faith is the gift of God*. Whatever the Holy Spirit finds in human nature to which He can appeal, whatever He can move upon in man's soul that has survived the fall, is only the lingering residue of man's fallen nature that He arrests before it sinks to utter destruction. It is a precious remnant of our lost heritage, but it has in it no element for self-complacency. Of Him *we are* in Christ ; and from the first awakening of man's dead soul to his translation into Christ *no flesh may glory in His presence*.

II. And now the apostle leads us to the brighter side of the cross, and shows us the believer with his recovered rejoicing. He *glories* in the Lord, and *the Lord* is the object of his glorying.

1. The glorying itself must first be considered : it means no less than a conscious enjoyment of the Lord and His salvation as our own ; the sense of the soul's completeness in Him ; and the consolation in hope of His full redemption.

The two words, *glorying in the Lord* and *rejoicing in Christ Jesus*, express, when united, St Paul's highest exhibition of Christian privilege. When the atonement becomes man's only ground of trust, Christ becomes his own and the source of his purest joy. All that Jesus is *made unto him* he receives by a faith that receives not the gift only but the

Giver also. This is the common Christian prerogative to receive Christ by an individual appropriation that more than restores all that the soul had lost. He gives Himself, the whole and undivided Christ, to everyone who has renounced all for Him. The word imparts the soul's exaltation in the possession of an infinite good. It is that in us which corresponds to His rejoicing over our salvation: we already enter into the joy of our Lord, finding our soul's lost treasure restored in Him, even as He finds in us the sheep that He had lost. It tells us that our sentiment towards the Redeemer has not reached the evangelical standard so long as it is a distant reverence, or a shrinking fear, or a passive hope. The believer who renounces self becomes partaker of Christ; and in proportion to the humiliation and sorrow with which he approaches the cross, is the conscious enrichment and enlargement of heart with which he goes on his way rejoicing. *Let him glory in the Lord* is the divine authority for the highest exaltation of the soul on Christ.

But that glorying further signifies an habitual sense of completeness in Him as to all spiritual need. His wisdom becomes our wisdom; for out of its treasures we receive through the Spirit and the word all needful truth, and are *filled with the knowledge of His will*. His righteousness becomes ours; for the virtue of His atonement avails for our constant pardon, and for our constant assurance of it. His sanctification becomes ours, for we

have His Spirit abiding in us continually. And His redemption becomes ours, for it is in us the power of a never-failing victory over the power of sin, and subjection to the vanity of the creature. What more than this can man need upon earth? What more could God give from heaven? *In everything we are enriched in Him.* There is no evil and no defect in our nature for the supply or removal of which he has not made provision. *Surely shall one say*, cried the ancient prophet—and by that *one* he meant every true Christian in the distant dispensation—in the Lord have I righteousness and strength—the double and all-sufficient blessing, righteousness as a sinner, and strength as a saint, in the perpetual possession of which we may every one of us glory.

It is also the exaltation that looks forward to the future in the confidence of hope, and more than hope. This glorying looks back to the day of Christ's cross, and finds peace; it looks up to His throne and finds habitual strength; it looks forward to His advent, and with an humble confidence that is full of glory. Released from the condemnation of sin by redemption in the past, and from the power of sin by a present redemption, the believer awaits a last redemption from the effects of sin for ever. The mighty man may for a season glory in his might, the rich man in his riches, the wise man in his wisdom; but *all such rejoicing is vain* when it confronts death, judgment, and eternity. The Christian has the earnest of a finished victory

and a full deliverance. Having *Christ within him the hope of glory*, he has in Him the pledge of an eternal redemption.

2. This glorying is in the Lord as evermore going back to Him as its supreme object.

It pays Him the homage of the highest gratitude, the gratitude of perfect love. We offer to Him—or rather we are here exhorted to offer—the deepest adoration that the creature can present to God, combined with the warmest thanksgiving that a creature saved from death can present to an infinite benefactor. The soul's *glorying* here expresses no less than this, its best offering that can be lawfully rendered to none but God ; and He whose redeeming mercy we extol, and shall extol for ever, is our God incarnate, who loved us with an everlasting love, and whom, in the unity of the Father and the Holy Spirit, we magnify and adore for ever.

But this exhortation more directly refers to the jealous watchfulness with which we must give to His atoning mediation its tribute. *Let him glory in the Lord*, and only in the Lord. The Lord our Redeemer is a jealous Redeemer, and will not suffer the glory of that name to be given to another. He will share the honour of our salvation with none. As Jehovah maintained a perpetual controversy with His ancient people because they joined the names of other gods with His name in their worship, so in the Christian church the Redeemer has from the beginning been dishonoured by rival mediators, multiplied and resorted unto

from age to age, in spite of His eternal protest, *I know not any*. Let us be for ever on our guard; and, while we are free from the grosser forms of error that rob Him of His glory, let us see to it that we fall not under the influence of its lesser delusions, and give to men, or systems, or ceremonies, or the flesh in any form, the glory that He demands supremely for Himself. *He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord.*

We render Him the highest tribute and our noblest response of love by dedicating our all to His service, and by testing to the uttermost His power to save. But here also the word of exhortation assumes a monitory tone. We may recal His own words to His disciples, and give them another application. *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.* Herein is the Redeemer glorified, that we receive in ourselves and exhibit to others the full power of His saving name, proclaiming everywhere by our sanctity and victory over the world that the gospel is the power of God. No higher honour can we reflect upon our Master's name in this life than that which is rendered by the perfect sanctity of our conversation. In the other world, and at the great day, He will be *glorified in His saints* in another sense; by that last display of His redeeming power which He reserves for the end, He will vindicate His own glory for ever. But in the present state He looks to His people for their tribute to the efficacy of His grace and the power of His name. *So shall ye*

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be my disciples, follows hard upon *Herein is my Father glorified*. If we, who are the representatives of our Saviour's name, and patterns for believers of what the gospel of the cross can do for man, present an unworthy exhibition of its power, we make our own glorying void and dishonour that holy name by which we are called. But if we seek to confirm by the holiness of our lives, and entire redemption from the evil of the world, the tribute of profession which we offer with our lips, then will our homage be perfect, *the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in us, and we in Him*.

XVI.

THE GREAT CONFSSION.

ST MATT. XVI. 15-18.

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am ? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona : for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

JESUS in the gospels, the centre of His chosen apostles, represents to us the future Jesus, the centre of His witnessing church. He beheld, in this first company of His followers, the germ of the great congregation of believers to the end of time. To His eyes, these *few men of Israel* expanded into the *multitude that no man can number*.

Hence all His relations to them were typical of His relations to the future church. Not only were the lessons which they learned, the wonders which they saw, the benedictions which they received, intended to survive and transpire through their ministry, but all the records of His communion with them were designed to teach us, *who now see Him not*, what He is, and how He acts towards ourselves. And thus the visible Jesus, in the midst of His disciples, rehearses the secrets of His future government; in the gospels we have the beginnings of His ministry of grace; and He who came as the Anti-type of all the types, is the Type of His future Self.

Then we may humbly follow these first disciples into the retirement to which their Master withdraws them. We may enter the wilderness where God once more converses with men; and not merely as witnesses of an impressive scene, but as actors in it. True, that something takes place in which we cannot participate. These disciples are apostles also, and, as such, are in course of preparation for an office that invested them with peculiar prerogatives—prerogatives that were scarcely transmitted to the universal church, certainly not to any of its individual members. Leaving to the apostles the special dignities conferred upon them in the person of their representative, St Peter, we may make our own the remainder, in which the Saviour holds communion with us all.

What, then, is the meaning of this sequestered

interview? Looking carefully at the narrative which sheds its clear light on the whole, we perceive that our Lord took His disciples apart to test their faith in Himself, pronouncing His benediction on their confession, and finding in it His own consolation. And then we perceive that after testing His disciples' faith, and rejoicing in their devotion, He lays them under the pledge of an unflinching maintenance of their faith even unto death. Regarding ourselves too as gathered around the invisible Person of our Lord, let us receive, in dependence on His Holy Spirit, the instruction which this scene affords.

I. Our Lord here tests the soundness of our faith in Himself.

These disciples had been sent forth on a preliminary mission. Sundered from their Master for a season, they had been made acquainted with many things that in His presence they could not learn. They had become familiar with the course of public speculation and feeling in respect to His claims. Hence He asks them, *Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?* They give Him, in reply, a summary of the current of opinion throughout the northern part of the land:—that is, of the more friendly opinion; for, the blasphemous thoughts that found free utterance in the south, they either knew not, or reverence forbade their mentioning. But these carnal speculations He knew full well. He was privy to every imagination of all hearts,

and needed not that any should tell Him. His design was not to hear what others said, but to test the soundness of His own disciples. To bring them to a mature faith in Himself as the Christ of God, had been, and was to the end, the object of all His dealings with them. Hence He makes no comment on their summary of opinion, but instantly superadds that other question, *But whom say ye that I am?* Simon Peter, representative of the apostolic company, and representative of confessorship for ever, gave the reply. Opening his heart to the influences of the Divine Spirit, and gathering up his whole soul in the high inspiration of a full devotion, he uttered the highest confession that had ever yet been heard from human lips at least: *Thou, the Son of man, art Christ, the Son of the living God!* Our Lord accepted that confession, the primitive formula of all confessions, as the result of a higher teaching than man's; He pronounced Simon Peter blessed, as the representative of all future confessors, because the Father had revealed to Him the truth.

Hence we learn for ourselves that our thought of Christ, and the character of our confession of His name, is the supreme test of our faith; that we can sustain that test only by a Divine teaching; and that those who are thus taught are blessed.

1. The great question put by our Lord himself to all Christians is still, *Whom say ye that I am?* His name, His person, His worth, is the sum of test and decision for all men and every man for time

and for eternity. As the Son of God is the centre of the Trinity, so the incarnate Son of God and Son of man is the centre of the universe to the human race, the basis and summary of man's truth, the foundation of his knowledge—the Alpha and Omega of his being, destiny, and hope.

The value and integrity of every system of theology is determined by the place which Jesus has in it. *To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto the truth*: this was our Lord's answer to Pilate's double question made one—*Art thou a king, then?* and *What is truth?* Christ is the only potentate in the whole domain of truth; His is the treasury of all wisdom and knowledge; and those whose Christianity will be found to endure the test, when the transitory contentions of party are over for ever, must hold a creed that gives Him His supreme place. Their every thought, opinion, and belief, must be adjusted to His name and dignity. *He that is of the truth heareth my voice*: He claims the fealty of every soul that studies the things of God. And all creeds and ceremonials of worship are orthodox and acceptable according to the testimony which they bear to His name. Everything pertaining to His church's confession and devotion, from its humblest hymn to its most elaborate ritual, depends for its acceptance upon the homage which it pays to Him the Mediator.

So also the faith of every individual man is tested by the same question. We rise or fall according to

the estimate we have of Christ; and His name detects the thoughts of all the hearts of men who hear it. This great truth was most solemnly affirmed at both the limits of our Saviour's history: at its beginning it was the earliest prophecy over His infancy, and it was almost the last declaration that He himself made. *This child*, said Simeon, *is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel.* *Whosoever*, said the Lord at the close of His ministry, *shall fall on this stone, shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.* He who builds not here his hope for time and eternity, must perish. He who makes Christ his foundation, shall abide for ever. We are before God what Christ is to us. Our present state is determined by the feeling of the heart that believes or disbelieves on Him, and by the utterance of the lips that confesses or denies. *Whom sayest thou that I am?* is the question now. *What was I to thee?* will be the question hereafter.

2. Again, we are taught that the faith in Christ which will endure the test, must come from the teaching of heaven. *Not flesh and blood, but my Father which is in heaven*, hath taught thee this.

The Father teaches, as the later Scripture shows, always by the influence of the Holy Ghost. The apostles were already under the preliminary teaching of the Spirit, who, although not yet glorified as the perfect Revealer, was beginning to be given from on high. Now that the economy of redemption is complete, the office of the Holy Ghost to

reveal the Son of God is as distinctly declared as the Saviour's office to redeem mankind. As *no man knoweth the Father but the Son, and He to whom the Son shall reveal Him*; so we may add, no man knoweth the Son but the Spirit, and he to whom the Spirit shall reveal Him. This is the very supplement of St Paul, who says, *No man can call Jesus Lord, with a true faith and living experience, but by the Holy Ghost*. He reveals the name of Jesus in the confession of the church universal. It has been His office to watch over the creed of Christendom, amidst all the fluctuations of heresy and error. He has maintained the true faith of the church, and the true interpretation of the Bible as the record of Christ. He can no more forget His office to defend the faith than Christ can forget His office to save His people. He has never suffered, nor will He ever suffer, a confession to be wanting to sum up and seal the Christian truth. And He is also the Revealer of Christ to the individual heart. He prepares the spirit of the seeker to behold the vision, and, when all things are ready, He discloses the Lord to the faith He himself imparts. In the moment of that revelation, Christ, hitherto a general name and a general Benefactor, becomes a personal Saviour, whom the confessor can claim as his own. St Paul has told us how, in that one memorable instance of his appropriating boast, *He loved me, and gave Himself for me*.

Without this revelation of the Father, the teach-

ing of flesh and blood can be of no avail ; whether it be regarded as neglecting the higher guidance, or as merely falling short of it.

That teaching of man's reason which refuses the aid of heavenly influence has been the source of all the errors that have troubled the church from the beginning. St John, writing at the close of the century of inspiration, gave its speculations the character of antichrist. That spirit had even then assumed many forms, and from that day to this it has gone on, with an ever-increasing fertility of invention, in its variations on the name of Jesus. *Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am ?* is a question the answer of which could not now be given as compendiously as the apostles gave it. The name of our modern antichrist is legion. Schools of opinion, with their endless shades of theory and views, abound on every hand. *Flesh and blood*, renouncing the Holy Ghost, was never more earnest in its effort to solve the mystery of Christ. Never was His person more intently studied, never were His claims more keenly searched, never did He reveal the working of so many baffled minds. Some say that He was an impostor, and in their utter darkness blaspheme His name ; but their number is small, and grows smaller still. Others faintly disguise their infidelity by ranking Him among the pious enthusiasts who have swayed the religious opinions of our race. Some accept Him as Jesus of Nazareth, the *Son of man*, the first prophet raised up by God among men ; but make it their

ceaseless study to disprove His claims to be the *Son of God*. Others accept Him as *Jesus the Christ*; but their *Jesus* is only a holy person, whose words and deeds were idealised by the imaginations of a later age into the form enshrined in the gospels; and their *Christ* is only a personification of the general instinct of humanity groaning for a deliverer; an instinct which among the Jewish people assumed its intensest form, and in the conflict of mythologies vanquished every other. But enough of the frenzies of *flesh and blood*. Like the holy apostles, we shrink from alluding to the worst forms of rationalist speculation. Suffice to say that the Holy Spirit, jealous of His prerogative, gives them over to strong delusion who *will not come unto Him* that their creed may be quickened into life.

It is perhaps more profitable to remember that the instruction of flesh and blood may, without insulting the Divine Spirit, yet fall short of His influence. And that defect is scarcely less fatal in another way. There is a human teaching which is God's own appointed instrument for the edification of men in the knowledge of Christ. But, like faith, it is *dead, being alone*. It is the letter only, until the Spirit quicken it into life. To know Christ after the flesh, to utter a well-ordered confession of faith which gives the Redeemer's name its rightful honour, is a very great blessing; but in itself it is not enough. The result of early instruction in the school of the household and of the church, and of more mature instruction from the christian pulpit, it is an un-

speakable advantage as the basis of the Spirit's teaching. But it is only when He makes the knowledge of the mind the knowledge also of the heart, and elevates theory into experience, that the soul is blessed.

3. And what is the blessing which the Saviour pronounces? It is here exhibited under two aspects; first, as the individual blessedness imparted by Christ to the soul; and, secondly, as the mutual bond of benediction between Christ and His saints.

This experimental knowledge of the Lord is the soul's true and only blessedness. The Redeemer pronounces Simon Peter blessed *because* the Father had taught him what only the Father could teach—the knowledge of Jesus as the way of salvation, imparting to His disciples *the words of eternal life*. But while He pronounced him blessed, He gave the benediction that He pronounced. He thereby tells every man that in finding Christ he finds His present and eternal blessedness; redemption from the curse and power of sin, from the unrest and distress of conscience, from all that can make man miserable here and fill him with the terrible apprehension of misery hereafter. The spiritual knowledge of Christ is the soul's rest from fruitless labour, its acquisition of infinite good. It is present blessedness, and the earnest of supreme blessedness hereafter. It is that which St Paul regarded as infinite gain: for which he counted all things but loss. This is here the Lord's own testimony, who knows

His own authority and power to fill the soul that trusts in Him with unmeasured good. And it is verified by the experience of all those who, taught their guilt and their need by the Spirit, go in humble desire to the same Spirit with their request, *Lord, we would see Jesus!*

This benediction is also the bond of mutual joy between Christ and His servants. We cannot fail to see in this interchange of confession and blessing an expression of the great truth which gives life to the worship of the church, that the full blessedness of the soul is communion with the Lord. As He will throughout eternity give and receive an eternal benediction, so in the present state He rejoices in the fellowship of His saints, receiving and returning their blessing. Simon Peter, on behalf of us all, uttered his joy as an ascription of honour to Christ. He rendered to his Master the tribute of his perfect gratitude, and obtained in reply the bestowment of his Master's benediction. And, for our sake also, he is singled out and addressed by name and surname. The blessedness of Christ's people in communion with Himself is indeed a common blessedness. He receives the congregation, and diffuses through the assembly a general blessing that flows down to the humblest, and which influences more or less even those that refuse it. But the relation between Him that blesses and him that is blessed is strictly personal. There is a gracious individuality in His recognition of His people. While many hearts are united, and many voices uplifted together

in the confession of His name, He distinguishes with sure precision every one, even to the least, who contributes his portion ; and resolves the harmony of the whole into the melody that each in *his heart maketh to his Lord*. And this is an element in christian blessedness that must never be forgotten. It completes and fills up the whole idea. He first gives the soul in the knowledge of Himself the blessedness of peace with God and the hope of heaven ; He receives that blessing back from us in the tribute of gratitude to Himself ; He gives it back again with increase, and to each of His many friends who offers it. And thus the constant reciprocation of blessing between Christ and His saints upon earth prepares for the fellowship of benediction in heaven.

II. Passing now to the second purpose of our Lord's testing question, we must consider the pledge under which He lays them of a faithful maintenance of the truth which they profess.

The various opinions of men which they reported were all errors ; however respectful to His character, they evaded His Messiahship. The creed His disciples uttered was the truth : it contained the germ of the christian doctrine, and, expanded after the resurrection, was to be the final confession of the faith. Upon that confession, as preached by His apostles, He would *build up a church* against which the *gates of hell should not prevail*. That was enough for the time. The errors of the day were not yet to be

confronted. First, the great sacrifice must be offered; but, when by His death the truth was sealed, and the eternal foundation laid, then they must be ready to confirm their profession with their lives, and, if need be, seal it with their death. Hence we learn for ourselves, that the confession of Christ's name will vanquish every form of error; that every Christian shares the obligation of an entire devotion in this contest; and that the final triumph of this confession is sure.

1. The profession of Christ's name by living witnesses is the instrumentality that will give the truth its supreme and final victory.

The Lord foresaw that day all the innumerable errors which, without and within the church, would oppose the progress of His gospel. The errors of His own generation were slight in comparison with the endless variations of the original lie which were yet in the wastes of heathenism and in the future of His church. And what was His provision for the conviction and overthrow of all these errors? He here gives His own and His sufficient answer. *Whom say ye that I am?* is His appeal to His church in the person of His apostles; and He declares that upon their confession, upon the testimony of Simon Peter, representing the Twelve, as the foundation resting upon Himself, the underlying foundation of all, He would build His witnessing church. In other words, He appoints that living witnesses, in organised communions, carrying with them the confession of His name, should

establish everywhere His kingdom, and convert the world. Not the confession without the witnesses: a living church is not built up upon a principle or upon a truth, save as that truth is represented by personal witnesses of its power; or, leaving for a moment the figure of the rock, living men are the centre from which grows the ever-increasing congregation of Christ. But not the witnesses without the confession: *Whom say ye that I am?* The church must maintain her aggression by a sound creed, an orthodox pulpit, a pure Scripture, and a saving worship, else her commission is without its authentication and seal to the world. But neither the men, nor the confession, without the Holy Ghost, who is the Captain of the Lord's host, the only demonstration of the truth, the only strength of its servants, and the source of all success. The churches of Christ's faithful disciples, holding fast the faith once delivered to the saints, are sent forth under the guidance of the Divine Spirit to maintain their unflinching protest against every form of error among men that opposes the name of Jesus, defrauds it of His glory, or holds it in unrighteousness. *Upon this rock I will build my church.*

2. And when our Lord demands our profession of faith, He lays every one of us under the sacred pledge of a devotion that knows no limit. To found His church, and give her a confession, He went on His way to the death of the cross; and He tells us, what He only hinted to His disciples,

that His servants must imitate His own example of perfect self-devotion. He did not tell them plainly that in due time every one of them would be required to seal his testimony with his blood. They could not bear it then. Simon Peter, the representative of confessorship, abjured the thought of the Saviour's cross, and was not prepared, as none of them were prepared, for his own ; but we, who read this whole history with fuller light, learn the deep meaning of His words, that the professor of the name of Jesus must be ready for the confessorship of persecution, for the martyrdom of death ; and, thus ready for the supreme sacrifice of devotion, we shall then be surely prepared for all those lesser sacrifices of loyalty to which alone we in our day are called.

Heard with this meaning, our Lord's *Whom say ye that I am ?* receives its most affecting force as an appeal to His people. By that question in the wilderness of Cæsarea, He cast Himself upon His disciples' fidelity, and took refuge, as it were, in their tried devotion. Not far off were the multitudes who had followed Him with a hollow adulation ; fed with His miraculous loaves, they desired Him for their King, and made the Lord weary with their superficial homage. And not far off were the enemies from Jerusalem and elsewhere, who were concerting the plans which issued in His death. From both these classes of the multitude—types of all future false adherents and malignant foes—our Lord retired into the midst of His disciples. In

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St John's gospel, His question is, *Will ye also go away?* as those had gone whom He repelled by His searching words. Here, the question is, *Whom say ye that I am?* while so many were pursuing Him with slander and the bitterness of hate. Types, we have called them, of the Lord's false friends and foes. He is still surrounded by multitudes who, throughout a carnal Christendom, call Him *Lord, Lord*, knowing everything of Christ but the power of His grace, and entertaining every sentiment towards Him but that of submissive obedience. And He is still opposed by many enemies, writing, speaking, acting in defiance of His name, and as the ceaseless opponents of His truth. It becomes us, then, who make His name our glorying, to see to it that we give the question the response He most desires; to consecrate ourselves to the service that imitates His own; and to maintain our confession, whether as united in christian societies or as individual servants of Christ, in the spirit that shrinks not from any sacrifice that His cause may demand, whether of time or substance or life.

3. Lastly, we hear our Lord's declaration, for the encouragement of His servants from age to age, that the confession of His church should triumph against all the powers of darkness.

At this solemn hour of His career, when He first began to speak as in the presence of His cross, and drew near to the valley of the shadow of His death, there arose before His own spirit, and He

exhibits before ours, a vision of His future temple rising upon Himself as the foundation of the Twelve apostles, and built up from generation to generation of living confessors. Now, first, He gives a name to His great congregation of time and eternity, and prophesies of the increase and glory and consummation of the *church*. There arises also before His own Spirit, and He exhibits before ours, a vision of the anti-church, the kingdom of darkness. He sees the enemies of His truth plotting and executing their schemes of enmity against His spiritual empire, with persevering malignity, from generation to generation. He saw in the dark perspective the ten thousand subtle forms of error that should contend with His one eternal truth—the ten thousand engines of attack that should be directed against the lives and labours of its witnesses; and then, turning to His little company, and having us and the whole host of His servants for ever in His view, He said for their and our everlasting assurance, *Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

XVII.

THE SERVICE OF FRIENDSHIP.

JOHN XV. 15.

Henceforth I call you not servants ; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth : but I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

THE general impression left upon our minds by these words is this, that the Lord regards His disciples as at once servants and friends : the former relation qualifying the latter, and the latter elevating the former. Those who heard Him were not permitted to misapprehend His meaning ; for He went on to expound it at length. They did not understand that He released them from the bonds of an absolute service when He demanded from them the service of love ; they did not suppose that He abated the ardour of their friendship when He required from them the love of perfect

obedience. They felt that the two terms, blended so closely in His discourse, must be blended also in their experience. And we who overhear these words, and have an equal interest in them with the apostles, must strive for ourselves to enter into the spirit of this combination of sentiments towards our common Master.

There is a sense, indeed, in which the words especially referred to the twelve. *Henceforth* marked a memorable crisis in their religious history. Its date of demarcation, in their life, was the day of pentecost, when the Holy Spirit revealed to them the *mystery of Christ*, purged their eyes from the film which had hitherto obscured their vision, and glorified Him to their understanding and their hearts; when He made them the servants of Jesus, in the bonds of a love they had never before known, and friends in the bonds of an obedience they could never before render. But this distinction we shall not further dwell upon, save for the purpose of illustration. We may consider these words as furnishing a universal test of devotion to our risen Lord. That devotion is service offered with the love of friendship; it is friendship chastened by the reverence of duty.

I. Christ's service is the service of friendship. The Lord is here His own interpreter. His meaning may be gathered from His subsequent words, in which He refers to the relation we sustain to His person, to the interest we feel in the work

which is common to us and to Him, and to the principle that animates true christian service. We must love the Master we obey; we must feel an interest in our duty that nothing but friendship will give; and our work must be done, not as a hireling's labour, but in the spirit of pure devotion.

1. The relation between the Lord and His people is that of Master and servants; but the perfect bond of that relation is love to His person.

These disciples had hitherto been servants, whose awful sense of their Lord's dignity had never yet been quickened into the ardour of personal devotion that He desired. There had been a great gulf fixed between Him and them. They had been oppressed by the majesty of His person; His predictions of His cross had weighed heavily on their hearts; He had been, as it were, only a Master, whose commands they obeyed, while they *feared to ask Him* the meaning of His words. Their gratitude, indeed, for His constant goodness struggled with their awe; but still that perfect revelation of Himself and of His goodness was wanting which would make their devotion as ardent as their reverence was profound. That revelation came from the cross; and it was shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost. *Henceforth*—after they had received into their inmost souls the self-sacrifice of Christ in *laying down His life* for them—they added perfect love to perfect homage. Servants they one and all termed themselves to the end; but, from that time, one spoke for the rest the

common sentiment, *We love Him because He first loved us.*

In every Christian life there is the same *Henceforth*, dividing between the Christ known after the flesh and the Christ revealed by the Spirit. Until the hour of that manifestation of the personal Saviour comes, we can neither perfectly serve nor perfectly love Him. The moment when the Son of God is *revealed in us* is the moment of entire consecration to His will, and of supreme love to His name. Then He becomes the absolute Lord of our being: *Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; whether we die, we die unto the Lord.* Then ends the contest between sin and self and the Redeemer, who redeemed us for His own. He makes us free by His act of omnipotent grace, releasing us from the bondage of the law and of our sinful nature; but our very freedom becomes a sacred and eternal bondage to Himself; and the bond of that bondage is love. He fetters us to His own person and service by the ties of our heart's warmest devotion. *The love of God is the love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts.* He becomes the fairest among ten thousand to the mind's contemplation, the altogether lovely to the soul's desire. Perfect submission to His authority is the freest act of the loving will, never free till its freedom is lost in Him. Hence the bond between Christ and His servants is one for which human relations furnish no analogy, or parallel, or similitude. It is a sentiment that only He who is God in our own nature, redeeming

us by the sacrifice of Himself, can inspire. And none can know its secret but those to whom the *Holy Spirit shall reveal it.*

2. Our interest in the Saviour's work is, when made perfect, that of friendship. He shares His counsels with us, not as being His servants only, but as being His friends.

Once more, mark the history of the apostles' relations to their Master. Before the great *Henceforth* began, their thought of His work upon earth was simply that of the servants *who knoweth not what his Lord doeth.* They had watched from the commencement the unfolding of His commission received of the Father, without being able to penetrate its mystery. While He spoke to them of the vast designs He came to accomplish, and which He would accomplish by the suffering of death, they were *like men that dreamed*: the great design, and the means of its achievement, were alike hidden from them. Hence they simply did what He commanded them to do, and went whithersoever He sent them, but without more than a very limited personal sympathy with His plans. When, however, He had died and departed, and the Holy Spirit shed His light upon the Redeemer's passion, and brought His words concerning it to their remembrance, their minds entered into the infinite secret, and made it their own. They were then like men who had been admitted into the council-chamber of their Lord, and who came forth with new views, and a sublime vocation.

Henceforth they were *workers together* with Christ : He had told them *all that He had heard of the Father*, and their Master's business was not less theirs than His.

And this is, in a certain sense, the dignity and privilege of all believers. They receive the new testament as the perfect record of their Master's purposes, and the perfect directory of the plans by which His purposes are to be accomplished. His whole will, for themselves and for others, for the church and for the world, is one : and they receive it as the law of their bounden duty. But they count His will their own. They enter into the fellowship, not only of the Saviour's death and resurrection, but of His government also. *Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?* expresses the spirit of our Lord's dealings with us, His friends. He not only permits, He commands, us to cherish a personal interest in His schemes ; and therefore leaves much of the detail of our duty to our own thought and device and co-operation. His language is not, *Go and do this for Me*, so much as, *Come and let us do this together*. We must strive to perceive for ourselves the wisdom, and propriety, and fitness of His purposes, and enter into them as our own. We must make it our supreme ambition to share His thoughts, to let the *same mind be in us that is also in Him*, and look upon the nearer and more distant world, lying in wickedness, with His eyes. Thus we shall know the secret of the service that is offered by friends, conscious of an

interest in our Master's designs of mercy and grace that has only a faint type in the interest that any earthly servant can have in an earthly Master's business. But this leads to another illustration.

3. The principle that animates true christian service is that of the purest love: it is the service of friendship, in the more than human meaning of that word.

These first disciples, before their *henceforth*, had done their Master's will from a lower impulse: sometimes from fear, sometimes from ambition, sometimes for reward; they had never yet obeyed Him in perfect, self-forgetting devotion. *What shall we have?* was the question of one of the most generous of their company, and it more or less ruled them all. *Grant that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and one on Thy left, in Thy kingdom,* was the expression of a hireling sentiment that lurked in the hearts of all, though expressed only by two. *Thou hast made them equal unto us* was murmured by the envious in a parable which the Saviour uttered for His disciples' warning; and for their conviction also He suggested the question in another parable, *Doth he thank that servant?* But when these same disciples go forth to their duty after the baptism of pentecost, we trace no other constraint than that of love; or, if reward and compensation and dignity have any place in their thoughts, love controls these lower motives, and elevates them to perfection.

And so it is with us if our devotion is made per-

fect. We are indeed servants still ; He is still our Master, *and His reward is with Him, to render unto every man as his work shall be.* The whole tenour of the new testament is true to this its last saying on the subject. From the cup of cold water, through all the ministries of Christian charity, up to the highest self-sacrifice that offers life, our good deeds are to receive their appropriate recompense. But all this being true, the commanding energy of duty is always and only love. As the Lord does not disclaim towards Himself the servant feeling, while yet He prefers the sentiment of friendship—never more truly our Lord than when He says He calls us not servants—so the hope of everlasting rewards is not repressed by Him, while the impulse of love has the pre-eminence given to it. That impulse will quench the hireling and mercenary sentiment altogether, while it will lower, and guard, and keep under strict restraint the thought of reward. The relations of servants and masters among men may furnish some slight illustration under some happy circumstances. But the feeling of christian service is not like any common sentiment of man ; it is born from above, a secret of the regenerate life. The thought is not, How much of time, and labour, and substance belongs to the Lord ? or, How can I best turn this life to account for the next ? or, How can I attain to the highest glory, and the most intimate vision of God hereafter ? Not altogether unconscious of these questions, they do not rule the life. The same object is attained in a

more excellent way; and that more excellent way is love, which wins its reward without spending a thought on the reward itself, which earns its recompense without being conscious of the hire, which casts out calculation, and goes on its laborious and self-forgetting course, musing only on an infinite debt that for ever defies the debtor, who, still striving and failing to pay it, finds his perfection in the failure.

Thus briefly may we sum up that part of our Saviour's double word which elevates the service into friendship. He who is made free by the spirit of christian liberty becomes a servant of Christ in a new sense of the word servant. His Master is not an object of terror or of fear, but a person revered with the fulness of human love, with a sentiment that He only can inspire, and which is the very heart of christian devotion. His Master's service becomes his own; he has no business that is not his Lord's, and his Lord's business absorbs his thought. And in the discharge of his duty his strongest impulse is the love of gratitude, his highest reward his Master's approbation.

II. Let us now turn to the counterpart of this truth, and mark how our Lord impresses upon His disciples that their friendship must not degenerate into licence or presumption; it is and must be for ever only the *friendship of service*. This qualification and guard is not uttered in express words, but woven into the discourse that follows. He who

knew what was in man, knew what would be the danger of His friends ; and, with exquisite tenderness, shows what their peril would be, and how they should effectually guard against it. This He does, first, by reminding them of His own superiority and supremacy in this new relation : *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you* ; secondly, by teaching them their entire dependence upon Himself, for the ability to do anything as His friends : *I have ordained you that ye should bear fruit, and without me ye can do nothing* ; and, finally, by making the relation now and for ever conditional upon their obedience : *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you*.

1. There is an everlasting distinction between the Redeemer and His people in their mutual friendship.

This word in the language of men implies, generally speaking, a certain equality : not only harmony of disposition, and interchange of service, but the removal, so far as that relation is concerned, of all essential difference. Whatever disparity there may be in other respects, in men's friendship, and in whatever concerns and cements that friendship, there is equality. The high may descend towards the low, the low may be raised towards the high ; but in their friendship they are one. Thus it is after the manner of men. And thus it is, in some most affecting respects, between Christ and His friends. But still the eternal distinction remains. In His own words, *He chose us*. As He conde-

scended to make the infinite descent to our nature, and chose the race of man to be the object of His regard, so also His still more intimate alliance with His own, His union with individual souls, is the result of unspeakable condescension. He is evermore *God with us*. Though, in His union with our humanity, He is one with our race, His two natures are eternally distinct in His own person; and, however intimate and affectionate may be His relation to us, He never ceases to be our God. Though He came down from heaven to dwell with us, and make us His friends, He is still the Son of man *which is in heaven*. His majesty He was pleased to veil before these His earliest companions, but the Holy Spirit, when He had departed, made fully known to them His dignity; and they remembered Him as their *God manifest in the flesh*. Hence the profound reverence which is stamped upon their every allusion to His person, and name, and attributes; hence the conspicuous absence throughout their discourses and their writings of any reference to their being His *friends*. Though *He* called them not servants, they called themselves by no other name. At the moment of their supremest joy in Him, their joy is, in the language of one of them, spoken at a moment too when the memory of Jesus kindled his emotion into rapture, *unspeakable and full of glory*.

And in this they are examples to us. We must enter into their feeling of reverence; and, in all our thoughts and words concerning the Lord, main-

tain the reverent sense of the infinite difference between Him and ourselves. While cherishing the warmest personal love towards Him, like that of the bride in the forty-fifth Psalm standing at His feet, we must remember the command she heard : *He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him* ; and, like her, express our love in prostrate adoration. *Sanctify the Lord Christ in thine heart*, is an injunction we need constantly to hear, so apt are we, by reason of the innumerable tokens of His kindness, and our constant familiarity with His name, to lose our awe of His majesty. And, as this sentiment of adoration must be cherished in our hearts, and qualify our feelings of personal love to Christ, so must it be the guard on our lips when we utter our love to Him. The name of Jesus, His human name, is constantly upon our tongues ; it must needs enter into all our confessions, testimonies, exhortations, and devotions ; and therefore we are reminded by St Paul, that at that very name the whole universe bows down. The language of friendship and of love must needs to some extent pervade our worship ; we feel an instinct to express our first feeling in the first and most natural language, and to echo back to the Saviour the words of inexpressible tenderness that He is pleased to use towards us. But the Lord himself suggests His own caution : *Ye have not chosen me, I have chosen you*. When He makes Himself an example of uttermost humility, He tells His disciples, *Ye call me Master and Lord ; and ye say well, for so I*

am; and thereby reminds us that we also *say well* when we keep our language free from endearing epithets; and, in our most affectionate speech concerning Him, still *call Him Lord*.

2. As, on the one hand, our interest in Christ's work must be that of friends, so on the other we must remember that we are entirely dependent upon Him for the least ability to think, or speak, or act aright or successfully in His service.

Here again is a marked peculiarity in this divine friendship. The human friend must *show himself friendly*, not only by reciprocating benefits, but by giving of his own to his friend that needeth it. Human friends are mutually serviceable in their offerings of feeling and of action. But this heavenly relation passes into another sphere. We have nothing that we *did not receive*; and when we work for Christ, or give to Him of our substance, *it is of His own that we give Him*. The Lord had just before uttered the parable which teaches us our absolute dependence on Himself, as the branches hang upon the vine; and He now reverts to the words He had then made so emphatic: *Without me ye can do nothing*. Taking up the figure again, He gives it another application: *I have set you in the soil, ordained you that ye should through my husbandry bear much fruit*. In these words He himself becomes in the unity of the Father the husbandman, and His disciples are the objects of His culture and care. They rightly understood His words; and in their future lives we find

them guarding their sentiment of personal interest in the work they did for Christ, by evermore seeking the assistance of His grace, and giving to His grace the glory of their works. *I can do all through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

Their example confirms to us the Saviour's precept. In this respect also we are in deep peril, a peril which is indeed more subtle than the former, and requires our most especial watchfulness. The Lord leaves His work with us, and seems to confide in our affectionate interest in His plans. But because we are thus left to ourselves we are apt on the one hand to neglect the work, and on the other to take complacency in it as our own when performed. His very reliance on our friendship may thus be fatally abused. Hence the Saviour's warning, which reminds us that while He gives over His most precious interests into our care, He requires that we attend to them not in our strength, but in dependence upon His grace; and that, according to the measure of the grace He imparts, is His expectation of our fidelity and service. Hence, also, His admonition that His servants' plentiful usefulness is not of their own strength, and not to the glory of their own name, but of His grace, and that the *Father might be glorified.*

3. Lastly, the Lord guards our sentiments of love and delight in His service by the solemn intimation that His disciples are under probation for the blessedness of His present and of His final

friendship: *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

Here once more the analogy of earthly friendship utterly fails: to no such relation among men will these words apply. The condition is imposed by Him: on our part there can be none, for His fidelity can never fail; but to secure our love to Him from turning to presumption, He is pleased to make the sacred relation dependent on our fidelity. We are thus taught that, while He is pleased to accept His servants' obedience as their part in this mutual friendship, they are bound to render it by the most solemn obligations. It may be said, indeed, that the words, deeply pondered, leave another impression. Diligent and persevering performance of duty is the very nourishment that sustains the warmth of love; they who most perfectly obey Him are they who are least conscious of being under the law of obedience. But, though this is true, there are two thoughts that will bring out the full solemnity of the Redeemer's words.

The first is suggested by the consciousness that every one of us has of manifold and grievous failure. When we hear Him say, *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you*, who of us but must think with sorrow of the shortcomings and acts of disobedience that have marred his life of consecration? who but must feel in his heart that, suspended on such a condition, his relation of friendship with Christ must fail of its only security? But there is a precious consolation in remember-

ing that among the things which He commands is an habitual penitent reliance on His grace. Our duty to trust in His merciful acceptance is bound up with every other duty, and the sense of constant forgiveness heightens the joy that the soul finds in His service. The second consideration is, that the whole of our life of devotion on earth is a probation for the eternal friendship of our Lord. He has admitted us to this sacred relation now; but its final seal depends upon our fidelity unto death. Then, but not till then, will our friendship be ratified for ever, to be liable to no disturbance or interruption throughout eternity. Till that hour of final consummation, Christ's friends at their best estate must *rejoice in Him with trembling*.

In conclusion, there are some reflections on which we may profitably linger. The two leading terms of this text point out to us two prevalent errors in religion—two extremes against which let it be our wisdom to guard.

There is a religion which is a service without love, a religion that regards the Lord as only an *austere man*, and never dares to aspire to the assurance of His favour and peace. In its darkest aspect, the spirit of such a religion is utterly servile, keeping those who are its victims all their lifetime in bondage, not only through the fear of death, but through a needless fear of Him who hath abolished death. It spends itself in the sad endeavour to propitiate in another way than that He has appointed a wrath that the Redeemer has already

borne for us all. In its milder form, this spirit refuses the comfort of the gospel, fears where no fear is, cries terror when there is no terror, and resolutely fights against its own peace.

There is also a religion which is too full of confidence towards the Lord, based upon a faith that has known no conviction of sin, and springs not from a true repentance. At its worst, the spirit of this religion is hollow, unreal, and presumptuous; looking idly at the highest blessings of the gospel while its first principles have not been learned. It knows of no crucifixion with Christ, no death to sin; but seeks to enter into heaven some other way. In its gentler form, it is a religion which is too familiar with the name of Jesus, and guards not with reverence the precious gifts that have been bestowed by mercy at the cost of the Redeemer's blood.

Let our religion avoid these opposite errors. Let us be sure that we enter into Christ's service by receiving the manifestations of His pardoning love. Let us maintain our confidence in His love by offering Him the constant service of holy obedience. Let our loyalty be full of love, and our love be full of loyalty. Let us serve Him with the heart of friendship, with the hands of bondmen. So shall we prepare for the friendship and service of heaven, unknown as yet; and be welcomed by the words which will be the final and best illustration of our text: *Well done, good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your Lord.*

XVIII.

THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 COR. XI. 26.

*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup,
ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

THERE are in the new testament two, and only two, memorials of the Lord, bearing in their name their sacred relation to Himself, *the Lord's day*, and *the Lord's supper*. In both cases the designation stamps a commemorative character : the one commemorating the resurrection of the Lord, the other His death, while they alike bear witness to His risen life. Both names were the last of a series, consummating, as it were, without superseding, several others : the Sabbath became the first day of the week, and that again in the final book of scripture received its highest elevation as the Lord's day ; the breaking of bread and the eucharistic communion became, in its last and

noblest title, the Lord's supper. And in the earliest usage of the church the two were blended; as in the last historical notice of the Acts we find that the disciples whose communion St Paul joined were met together on the first day of the week to break bread: thus the day that celebrated the accomplishment of redemption celebrated also the death by which that redemption was accomplished. Very early in the age succeeding that of the apostles, christian sentiment, following the guidance of scripture, though without the sanction of its express word, further applied the appellative to the church in its assembly, and termed it *the Lord's house*; and for many ages the Lord's people assembled on the Lord's day to partake of the Lord's supper.

We are ourselves thus assembled: in the manner of the first christians, and for the same object. Let us seek to enter into their spirit also, as it is exhibited in the teaching of the apostle Paul, who delivers to us the instruction that he had received, tells us what it is we do, and points out to us our privileges and our obligation. Let us mark with what emphasis he makes it *the Lord's supper*, as appointed by the Lord to commemorate His death, to be the sacramental seal of our participation in His life, and the pledge taken and received of His final coming to His people. May the Holy Spirit represent Him to us at the table which is still His own, and reveal to our remembrance, to our faith, and to our hope, its meaning.

I. In the Lord's supper we celebrate the Lord's death, according to His own appointment.

Concerning this holy ordinance we have no other instruction than that of Christ himself. And if we take St Paul as our teacher, instead of going straight to the first celebration, when, under the Redeemer's hands, the paschal feast passed into the christian sacrament, it is only because he gives us the Saviour's more full interpretation of His own words. We still have the same institution in another version: the solitary definition that the scriptures furnishes to guide our thoughts. We learn from his rendering of Christ's sayings and the addition which he was commissioned to make, that in our sacramental service we commemorate as a church the Saviour's death, exult in Him who wrought by it a great deliverance, and at the same time preach it to the world.

1. This is the new paschal feast, transfigured and glorified, in which the Lord's people, the new Israel, celebrate the redemption of mankind through the atoning death of Christ, and remember, in adoring gratitude, Him whose oblation of Himself, once offered, released us by a mighty deliverance, ratifying for us and with us a new covenant in His blood. This celebration is at once the common and the individual act.

We celebrate redemption as a redeemed people. As the Israelites by their households rejoiced annually before God in remembrance of that great deliverance which made them the covenant people

of Jehovah, so the christian church in its several households also, which are its several congregations, join more than once in the year, in celebrating that grander redemption, which required, not the stretched out arm of God, but the sacrifice of His incarnate Son. We commemorate our own and the world's deliverance from worse than Egyptian bondage ; from sin, and death, and hell. Therefore *we keep the feast*, rejoicing in Christ *our passover, who was sacrificed for us*. We keep it, indeed, in a perpetual celebration. The cross is the watchword of the church's glorying in all its assemblies. Our religious services are one continual feast, in which we echo upon earth the never-ceasing sacramental hymn of heaven : *Unto Him who hath washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, unto Him be glory for ever and ever*. But in this solemnity we most formally and expressly bring the great atonement before our minds, and contemplate the redemption wrought out for us at so great a cost. The paschal sentiment pervades all christian worship, and makes the whole of the church's service a holy work ; but the day of the eucharist is the *great day of the feast*, its most exalted remembrance of the cross. We celebrate the covenant of peace between God and man, ratified in the blood of our atoning Lord.

Each christian contributes his individual rejoicing also. Not, indeed, as an isolated act : the Lord's supper is pre-eminently and most expressly

the church's act. The other sacrament pertains to the individual as such: this to the entire community. But it is the feast of a covenant, the seal of which is personal: pledging to each sinner mercy and grace, and laying each under the obligation of humble obedience. The Israelite who kept the passover was thereby reminded of the covenant with him and his ratified on the ever-memorable night of the national redemption; and he assumed the whole burden of the obligations on which his name and place among the people was suspended. In a still more directly personal manner the christian penitent, keeping the feast, enters into and continually renews his covenant with God in Christ: rejoicing by this token in the divine mercy to his soul, and pledging himself by this token to keep the christian law.

2. Not only do we celebrate the accomplished redemption, but we remember with adoration and gratitude the Lord, whose interposition saved our race. That interposition united the persons of the trinity, and therefore the eucharist is a sacramental homage to the triune name revealed in the atonement. But still the word is, *This do in remembrance of me*; and the specific object of this act of thanksgiving is the name of our redeeming head.

These most solemn words, in which Jesus expressed His last command, bid us render Him our supreme homage as the Lord our Saviour. By the right hand of His own almighty power He rescued us from an enemy from whom none but God could

save us. And He demands from His covenant people the same unlimited reverence and jealous honour with which Jehovah of old required His name to be remembered. There is no higher proof of His divinity as a Saviour than this. While He seems to lay claim to the gratitude of His servants for the highest benefit that man could receive, He requires it as a divine benefactor; the warmest human gratitude blended with the profoundest creaturely adoration. It is the voice of the God of Israel, jealous of His own glory, demanding of His people their perfect homage, and the eternal memory of His goodness. In the eucharist we bless our supreme benefactor, extolling His divine perfections, displayed in the weakness of our flesh, and upon the cross for our salvation.

And how can this homage be rendered, or this gratitude be expressed, so as to make the redeeming Lord its object? By making the bread we eat and the wine we drink the pledges of our perfect devotion to Him as our Master. We have magnified the great redemption and *joyed in God through Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement.* In the unity of the Father and the Holy Spirit we have extolled the redeeming God. We have adored the thrice holy name sanctified to us at the cross. And now our remembrance must rest and settle upon our crucified and risen Lord. He demands this homage above all, that we copy the example of His devotion; that we lay ourselves upon the

altar that He has left vacant for that purpose, and consecrate our every faculty to His service, even as He surrendered all for us. Love for love : this is the measure of our remembrance. We are at His table still ; we kneel not before a visible altar, on which a sacrifice of expiation is yet presented. But He lays us under the pledges of a sacred rivalry with Himself, in which we must needs be defeated, but, like Himself, sink into our perfection. *Lovest thou me ?* was His last question spoken to any individual soul before He left the world. *Follow thou me !* was His last commandment. This question and this command were uttered at His final feast of reconciliation and peace. They are uttered at every supper of the Lord. *This do in remembrance of me.*

3. Our commemorative service within the church is also a proclamation to the world. St Paul has chosen the word that signifies throughout the new testament the preaching of the everlasting gospel. There is nothing in the christian economy that does not preach to man ; but in this solemnity we declare, with most impressive earnestness, our common faith.

We proclaim always, when we thus meet, that we are confessors of the cross. We meet, like the early apostles, with closed doors, but the world must needs take knowledge of what we do. Here we make our confession, at a simple table, with the simplest memorials, without any adventitious or superfluous symbols, our only emblems being

the bread and wine which Christ hath consecrated for ever, that we are the disciples of a Master whose body was marred and broken, whose blood was shed as a malefactor's, and whose death the scripture itself terms the bearing of a curse. The church from age to age bears witness to her faith in the cross, at the foot of which every service like this is celebrated. The name we glory in is that of the Crucified : an offence and a stumbling-block to multitudes in every age, but to us the symbol of our highest glorying. This is the ordinance by which it has pleased the Lord that confession of His name should be made before men. His insignia are not taken from His divine majesty in heaven ; the tokens of His people's faith are not anything that suggests His exalted dignity. It is His death that they must remember and show forth before the world. Alas, that His people have so often mistaken His will, and hidden the simple bread and wine from the view of men !

We also preach in another sense through this sacrament to the world. We meet, it has been said, with closed doors, but the world is not shut out. No clearer, or louder, or more affecting voice of mercy is heard than that which cries *Come* to all the children of men who watch our holy mysteries. The covenant we celebrate we declare to be a covenant, not for a nation or a race, but for the entire family of mankind. Hence we do not too scrupulously isolate and hide this service. We do not retire into our garden inclosed, and to our

fountain sealed, to eat our morsel alone, and drink waters that then would be indeed stolen waters. We spread our simple emblems, scarcely veiled, before all who pass by, and mourn that any should turn their back upon them while we remain. *Is it nothing to you, O ye that pass by?* The invisible Redeemer silently pleads from His table with those who know that they are redeemed by His blood, but have never either honoured His atonement by their faith, or begun to give Him the response that He demands. And we who rejoice to commemorate the death by which we live, show forth to all our fellow-sinners the cross in which they have as much interest, in virtue of their birthright and of their sin, as ourselves.

II. While the death of Christ is the object of our commemoration, our sacrament must not be disjoined from His life. It is the symbol of our communion with Himself in heaven.

To separate the life from the death of the Lord is inconsistent with the nature of this memorial ; and it is one of the sad results of antichristian corruption, that the eucharistical celebration is so seldom regarded by us as a sacramental communion also. But, without controversy, great is this mystery of godliness ; and we must strive to bear in mind that these covenant emblems are pledges of Christ's presence in His church ; that they are signs and seals of our spiritual nourishment through the impartation of Himself, and

that they are symbols of our fellowship as one body in Him. Without controversy : doctrinal exposition and polemic discussion are alike out of harmony with the purely festal character of this solemnity. We need not pause to denounce the theory that transmutes these creatures into the veritable incarnate person of the Redeemer. Nor need we dwell upon our distrust of the needless subtlety that teaches the bestowment of Christ's glorified body and blood on the believer, in and with and under the elements. It is enough for us to take the plain words of our Master and His apostle, and with these before us we are content to say, *It is enough.*

By these tokens the Saviour pledges His real presence among His people to the end of time. These signs of an invisible Lord are left behind till He come : and why, but to remind us that He is still present by the Spirit. It is not indeed that He is in these elements : they would not be signs if He were the very things themselves, in them, or limited by them. But they are emblems that remind us of all that He has said concerning His presence with us to the end of time. Those who heard Him say on that eve of His departure, *This is my body*, had heard Him promise again and again that He would dwell among His disciples by the Holy Ghost.

The elements of man's nourishment were chosen by our Lord to be the signs and seals of His disciples' life through incorporation into His mys-

tical body, and the fellowship of His risen life. They are not of themselves spiritual food any more than the body which they nourish is spirit. But they are His divinely-ordained sacramental emblems of our union with Him ; signs that He is, and pledges that He will still be, the life of our souls. Imparting Himself once for all to us in our regeneration, this is the perpetual remembrancer that He is our life. Giving Himself to us in all His ordinances, in all the means of grace, and through the word without any other means, He gives us here a specific pledge to strengthen and invigorate our faith in them all. Let us not dream that the giver of our abundant life is limited to one channel for its bestowment ; let us not imagine that our life, hid with Christ in God, is hid in this bread and wine. But let us, at the same time, be careful not to forget that every ordinance ordained of Christ must have its sacred meaning ; and this one specially which was appointed in so marked and impressive a connexion with His disciples, need of His grace. Let us eat and drink in simple faith, not too curiously asking *How can our Lord give us Himself to eat?* Let us believe that, as surely as by divine appointment bread and wine nourish and refresh the body, so our Lord can by His Spirit, if He will, and most surely does if we forbid Him not, give Himself to us, that, like Elijah, we may go in the strength of this food to all the duties of our life and all the other means of grace rejoicing.

These memorials are also the symbols of our union one with another in Christ. Here also, as in relation to our spiritual nourishment as individual members of His mystical body, the sacrament is only an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. We are truly one through the fellowship of the Holy Ghost : *one body, one Spirit*. We are one also because *we eat* of one bread. No emblem of our unity is more impressive ; none more affectingly suggests our obligations. Those who partake of this sacramental bread receive, on the one hand, the common blessing of union with Christ and with each other of which bread is the sign ; and they bind themselves, on the other, to all the acts and offices and affections and charities that belong to the brotherhood of faith. Let us then contemplate, while we join in this communion, all that this act involves ; let us eat and drink together as those who are gathered out of the world into a unity of love, mutual forgiveness, mutual charity, and all the graces that pertain to the perfection of the family that calls Christ head.

III. Let us finally remember that this sacred commemoration of the past, and sacramental communion in the present, is also an avowal of our faith and hope in the Lord's return.

These symbols are seals of a covenant, one pledge of which is that He who came first with the burden of our sins unto death will come again without sin unto salvation. It was appointed unto

Christ once to die, and then to live for ever with the fruits of His passion in eternal glory. His return is as needful as His departure ; as needful indeed as His first coming. We do show forth His death *until He come* : that is, until that day shall dawn—or rather shall reach its meridian, for it has dawned already—when the Saviour will consummate the designs of His grace, and end the economy on earth which on earth He began. He left not His disciples without the full assurance of His return. That promise He left them as His final legacy ; for if He promised His Spirit during the dispensation of grace on earth, if that promise was the last He himself uttered, and closed the charter of His own covenant, He sent His angel to add another and a still better clause : *This same Jesus shall come again*. And St Paul was instructed to impress this meaning upon the ordinance, Ye do show forth the Lord's death *until He come*. He thus pledges Himself to remember His covenant, to fulfil all His designs down to the last, and leave no purpose unaccomplished that His return must effect. As surely as we eat and drink these emblems of a departed Lord, so surely will He return to render them needless. Our faith looks backward in this solemnity, and it is trust ; it looks forward, and becomes the confidence of hope.

Here we publicly and solemnly declare our faith. Like our fathers, from generation to generation, we avow the great expectation that makes all ages one. We declare that we are as confident of

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Christ's return as we are of His having once been on earth and shed His precious blood. We measure off our time by this succession of feasts ; assured that every eucharistical celebration brings that time of salvation nearer, when Christ shall come and supersede the means of grace by the glory of His presence, when He shall end faith for ever, give hope its fruition, and begin the better, richer, more precious and more satisfying economy of sight. Every such sacrament is an act of communion with the universal church. Whatever other differences may exist in doctrine, in service, in ritual, in discipline, and in all things else—this is the common bond of the true congregation of Christ's faithful people, united in one deep central hope. It may be said, indeed, that it is an act of communion with the church universal, the family of heaven and earth, having one only Father and naming one only name. For both worlds unite, and angels and men combine, in the expectation of the Lord's great day :—all alike lingering *to see the end.*

Meanwhile, the individual communicant avows thus his personal faith and hope as a member—insignificant but not forgotten—of that universal church which cannot die, but will receive the Lord when He cometh. We belong to that mystical company—that one corporate body—which in Christ hath made a covenant with death, to know it no more for ever. We may all of us, individually, depart and join the Lord in paradise before He

come ; buried by the way while the pilgrim band goes on. Still we measure off our short time by eucharistical solemnities ; whether we leave our sacramental company to carry on their celebration without us, or with them receive Him while we celebrate, in either case and in both *we show forth the Lord's death till He come.*

What wonder if the apostle, after this full exhibition of the privilege of the eucharist, bids us most anxiously and solemnly examine ourselves. It is the Lord's table, and He who presides over it is the Judge as well as the Saviour of His people. But the judgment He is willing to leave to us, reserving the salvation only to Himself. If we examine our own hearts rigorously, and spare not ourselves, He will meet us only in mercy. But woe to those who bring the Judas-heart : alas for those who mistake their privilege. The preparation we need is to discern ourselves, and discern the Lord in His holy ordinance ; and this discernment the Holy Spirit will aid. Let us pray Him to enable us to come with a full devotion, remembering the past ; to strengthen our faith in His present grace ; and to confirm our hope in the coming future.

XIX.

ALL THINGS ARE YOURS.

I COR. III. 21-23.

Therefore let no man glory in men : for all things are yours ; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours ; and ye are Christ's ; and Christ is God's.

THE one theme of the beginning of this epistle is man's glorying, lost through sin and recovered in Christ. In the opening chapter St Paul brings the human race, with all its imaginary attributes of wisdom, righteousness and strength, into the presence of the cross, and shows that its boasting was vain. He reduces man to nothing and less than nothing ; bids him take as the free gift of God his life and salvation, and give to the Lord alone the glory. But he is careful to add that man's ground of boasting is restored to himself : *let him glory*. Here he takes up that unfinished strain, and in the

most lofty terms that language could supply dilates upon the recovered dignity of mankind. Whereas before he had denied everything to human nature, now he cries *all things are yours*. Retrieved in Christ, the christian church has an unlimited prerogative ; a charter of privilege that excludes nothing within the compass of providence and grace, time and eternity. The apostle's words are *very bold* : he vindicates the dignity of the children of grace with the same unbounded strength of expression as he had employed to depict the degradation of the children of nature. His language passes into the sphere of transcendent joy, leaving formal exposition to halt far behind : and still he speaks the words of truth and soberness. The argument around which his sacred rhetoric glows may be made clear enough for our practical use. Let us then, in dependence on the Holy Spirit who gave him these great words, endeavour to follow his exhibition of the christian prerogative as derived from Christ and as enjoyed by believers.

I. The prerogatives of Christ's people are based upon their relation to Him : *All things are yours, because ye are Christ's*. Strictly taken, the expression is, *Ye are of Christ* ; and **the relation may seem to waver between that of union, and that of possession, and that of grace**. Neither of the three alone exhausts the teaching of scripture as to the dignity of those who call Jesus Lord. They may

be considered apart, but their full significance appears only when we combine them in one. The mystical church is one with her head, and shares all things with Him. His ransomed people in the midst of the world have all things made subordinate to their welfare. And, as individual objects of His grace, we are abundantly enriched with His gifts, and have all things granted to our prayers.

1. The union between the Lord and His elect church gives the highest illustration of our text. That union is spoken of throughout the scripture in language which stops not short of identity. The mystical family of heaven and earth is one with Him—His other self, and more than His *other* self, for it is the body of which He is the head, the *fulness of Him that filleth all in all*. Hence whatsoever belongs to the Redeemer belongs to His redeemed; and this great doctrine, taught by Himself and expounded by His apostles, throws its glory over the whole of the new theology *concerning Christ and His church*. But it requires to be carefully guarded, both as it respects that aspect of the church which it contemplates, and the sense in which it shows the Lord's prerogative.

These lofty words are spoken only of the mystical company of the faithful, who are united to Christ's incarnate person by faith, and have become one spirit with Him, and are regarded as already perfect. That holy community is viewed in scripture as a united whole, the multitude of the finally redeemed present to the eye and present to the

prayer of the Redeemer, though not yet actually gathered out of the world and perfected in one. As the spiritual body of Christ it is distinguished, on the one hand, from the race out of which it is called and elected, and, on the other, from the individuals of whom it is composed. It is the new humanity, of which Christ is the second federal head, and not the human race as such, that constitutes the fulness of Him who filleth all in all, and is so one with Him as to possess all that He is. And it is of the whole company of the redeemed, not of any individual member of that company, that these glorious things are spoken. It was for that mystical fellowship, the congregation of the sanctified and the glorified to the end of time and throughout eternity, that our Lord prayed in the words which give St Paul his argument: *Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are.* These words have their echo in our text: *Ye are Christ's, as Christ is God's.* The union between the Father and the Son is the last similitude—if similitude it may be called—by which the Lord declares the identity between the one body of His saints and Himself.

Now, to this mystical body united to Himself, the incarnate Head of a new humanity, He gives an unlimited interest in His prerogatives. *All mine are thine, and thine are mine,* He had said to the Father; and for those who are thus the common rejoicing of Himself and the Father He prays

prophetically that *the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them.* This was His last prayer; its answer runs through the epistles, and finds its highest expression in the words, *All things are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.* The ideal church of Christ is eternally one with Himself: reflects His divine glory, receives the fulness of His mediatorial gifts, and will be joint-heir with Him of God for ever. In Him His people already rejoice as their living head, and His dignity is theirs. He shares with them His all. Partakers of His death, and filling up the measure of His sufferings on earth, they sit with Him in heavenly places, with Him judge the world, in Him regain their supremacy over nature, and count all things their own. His saints are united with Him in all the stages of His progress towards universal supremacy as the incarnate Lord. They suffer with Him and reign with Him; they inherit the earth as He gradually reduces it to Himself; they vanquish in His victory the principalities and powers that retreat before Him. As the husband and wife are one flesh, and have all things common, so Christ and His church are one spirit, and have all things common. And that which is a sublime ideal throughout the earlier scripture is seen as a glorious reality in its last pages: the bride is made ready to share His glory in the New Jerusalem for ever.

2. Our possession of all things in Christ may be more practically referred to the mediatorial supre-

macy of the head of the church making all things contribute to our welfare. He is in this world purifying unto Himself a peculiar people, and for their good He governs the universe, making their salvation and welfare the law of His government. This superintending control may be viewed under two aspects : as He is the Lord of all ; and as He is the ruler within the visible church, making it minister to the increase of His saints.

When the apostle dilates upon the lordship of Christ he brings all the powers of the universe under His sway ; sometimes to magnify the glory of the exalted Redeemer, but oftener to show forth the absoluteness of His supremacy over all things *for the church*. He governs the principalities and powers of the other world with a constant view to the accomplishment of His designs in this. He ruleth in the armies of heaven for His people on earth ; they become ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation ; and all Christ's holy angels are thus ours. The hosts of evil, with their prince, are reduced into subordination to the church's welfare. Our friends they can never be, scarcely our servants ; and yet they are ours, because they are His, and their very enmity is translated into our advantage. They tempt us for our probation, assault us for the confirmation of our strength, and help us to enter into the fellowship of our Saviour's victory. This world, with all the *things present* that make up its course, is under the sway of our Lord for the well-being of His church. However hard it may be to

reconcile this truth with the seeming current of events, it is, nevertheless, the key to all history : Jesus and not Satan is the *God of this world*; its other prince has been cast out, and our Lord's mysterious, secret, but most certain sway, is bringing the politics of earth; the achievements of science, the progress of civilisation, into direct subordination to the spread of His kingdom and the salvation of His church. In this most sublime sense, Christ is *Lord of all*, and *all things are ours*, as serving our present and eternal interests.

He is also the head of a visible community, the church, which exists by His will, and is governed, according to His ordinance, for the salvation of its spiritual members. The distinction between the visible and the invisible body of Christ is not always maintained; but, when that distinction is made, it is made for the purpose of showing that the arrangements of the visible community—from the apostolate downwards—have this for their object, the growth of a living and holy temple to the Lord. The entire fabric of the church, as an organised constitution, is temporary, and more or less subject to the mutations of time; the *one body*, which rises into *the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*, knows no change, but, like Christ himself, abideth ever. Hence the great truth, of which St Paul makes himself, and Apollos, and Cephas the illustration, is this, that the organised ministry of the visible church is the servant of the church invisible. All gifts and administrations of human

office and ability, from the highest to the lowest, are only *helps* to the furtherance of the increase of that mystical body which the Lord contemplates through the ages in its growing perfection. Forgetfulness of this is the secret of most of the errors concerning the unity and authority of the church that have afflicted Christendom. The order has been and still is inverted. The saints have been brought into bondage to the church, instead of the church being the servant of the saints. This error, indeed, has produced the sad reaction of an opposite; and the visible church has by many been renounced, or undervalued, or sundered from its close connexion with the church invisible. But let the word of God be true; *both grow together*, the one in its visible and orderly organisation as the apostles left it, the other in its spiritual increase and sanctity; the visible, however, being the servant of the invisible, and *its* angels also ministering spirits to them that are heirs of salvation. True believers are *of Christ*, not of the church; He is their only Lord, and of the honour of that name He is jealous. But, calling Him Lord, they rejoice in the order and service of His church, as a rich inheritance to which He gives them a right. *Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, all are yours; and ye are Christ's.*

3. There is yet another ground of our right to all things in Christ, or rather another aspect of those already mentioned, which the scripture does not allow us to omit. All who are His have such

a place in their Saviour's heart, and such an interest in His resources, that they may be said, in virtue of His special favour, to be the possessors of all things. Here we have to do with the individual object of the Saviour's love rather than with the collective church. He denies His praying servant nothing, but bestows His gifts according to His own wisdom.

All things are yours, is the charter of personal prerogative. It is a most gracious truth that the Saviour who, in His mediatorial relations to His people, dispenses His blessings within the church and through the ordinances, is the personal friend of those who love Him, and gives Himself with the treasures of His grace to every individual believer. There is, indeed, as we have seen, a sense in which the apostle's large saying is true only of the mystical body of Christ. The highest prerogatives of union with Him, and supremacy in Him, belong to the holy community for the good of which He rules in the world without and within the church. But there is a sense also in which the apostle's words—*all things are yours*—belong to each, even the humblest believer who makes Jesus the object, as well as the mediator, of his prayer. We must not, while we contemplate His glory as the exalted Head of the body, lose sight of that *same Jesus* who taught us some of the first and some of the most precious lessons concerning Himself in the simple gospels. There He is the master of individual souls ; there He gives Himself, the whole and undivided Christ, to each ; and per-

sonal relations bring home every narrative most directly to our hearts. There we hear Him saying, *What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name I will do it. According to your faith be it unto you! Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name; ask and receive, that your joy may be full!* Uniting these distributed sayings in one, they most surely amount to a personal prerogative that does not fall below the apostle's *all things are yours*.

But here there is a necessary limitation which seems, but only seems, to restrict the petitioner's privilege. The Redeemer offers Himself and the gifts of His providence and grace to His servant; but He reserves to Himself the decision how much of the all things shall be imparted, and when the gift shall be bestowed, and when it shall be denied. Whatever has been purchased by the sacrifice of the cross for man is his; his virtually by the prerogative of membership in the redeemed race, actually his when he complies through divine grace with the conditions of the covenant. All things that pertain to life and godliness are pledged to him as his own, treasured up in Christ as his inheritance; and while he retains his interest in the covenant, as sure to him as *he is Christ's, and Christ is God's*. The redemption of his soul from the curse of the law, assured in the constant forgiveness of sins, is his; deliverance from the power of sin, and the sanctification of the entire nature, is his; and so is also the final redemption

of body, soul, and spirit, from the last traces of the bondage to which sin had reduced our race. These blessings He imparts in His fidelity, but imparts also in His wisdom : all of them are given at the set time. The spiritual portion of our inheritance He is more willing to give than we to ask ; their time of bestowment is always ready ; the penitent believer may receive the portion of goods that falleth to his soul,—pardon, peace, victory over sin, sanctifying grace and the gifts of devotion and charity—whensoever he asks. All these things are always ours ! Our other portion may be more slowly bestowed ; reserved from us, though our own, for reasons the wisdom of which we cannot always understand. Meanwhile, the glorious truth remains, that he who is in Christ and of Christ may echo and make his own the unlimited charter of christian privilege : *All things are mine, for I am Christ's.*

Thus we have seen the prerogative of the Lord's people as based upon their relation to Him. The mystical body of His redeemed shares His dignity as one with Him ; His saints, as militant on earth, have all things subordinated to their good ; and each believer has an interest in an unlimited covenant of grace ratified by His death, administered in His life. Now let us turn to the counterpart, and consider this prerogative as realised in the christian experience.

II. The apostle blends here the high statement

of christian privileges with practical exhortation to rejoice in them. Nowhere has he taken a wider sweep than here, embracing all and omitting nothing that human heart could desire. His strain begins with warning, but loses itself soon in the glowing testimony to the fulness of our prerogative, and ends by tacitly ascribing all the glory to Christ. We cannot do better than formally echo his thoughts in his own order.

1. The starting-point of this exhibition of our privilege is the warning, always necessary, to glory in nothing but our inheritance in Christ. He reaches his high object by first bidding the Corinthians renounce all lesser and unworthy rejoicing, and then by setting before them the amplitude of the ground they had for true rejoicing.

Let no man glory in men, is the strain to which St Paul constantly returns. Once before he had uttered it to claim for the crucified Redeemer His sole honour; now he repeats it to claim for the christian inheritance its rights. The Corinthians were in danger of exulting in their Lord's gifts rather than in Himself; of glorying in their own personal advantages and making the names of men their boast, rather than rejoicing in their substantial possessions in Christ. Their pride, their contentions, their divisions were sad proofs that they had not found the deep secret of their true riches in union with their Head, or that, if they had found it, they were in danger of forgetting it. The method he adopts to save them from this snare was the

same that he had adopted to bring them from trusting in their own wisdom and righteousness to a humble faith in Christ. *That no flesh should glory in His presence*, was the preface to a full exhibition of all that Jesus crucified is made to man. So here, *let no man glory in men*, introduces a display of the infinite reasons for rejoicing that the humble believer finds in the secret of union with his Lord.

The note the apostle here strikes is one that rings through scripture; and one that, however much abused, we cannot hear too often. It is this, that in Christ we have *all things* so made our own, that we may glory in the riches of a boundless inheritance. This is that liberty of the children of God wherewith Christ maketh His people free. The Son receives us into His Father's house; and to each one He says, *All that I have is thine*. He releases us by His grace from the bondage of sin, from subjection to the world, from the dominion of the creature, from slavery to death; and bids us, now *free indeed*, to be henceforth servants to none but Himself in God. He gives us an unlimited right to the blessings of life, to the means of grace, to the treasures of salvation, and to an inheritance in heaven; and bids us, in union with Himself, freely partake of all things. But this high prerogative is ours only as we are *His*, and it is enjoyed only in Him. United to Him by living faith, we become heirs of all things. This leaves no room for pride and self-complacency: for all is of Christ. It leaves no room for undue exultation in any indi-

vidual gifts, for the individual blessings are swallowed up in the glory of the great inheritance. This is what the apostle taught the Corinthians, and he teaches us the same lesson. But, having done so, he passes to a delineation of our privileges that loses all trace of warning, though the remembrance of that warning must still follow us.

2. The expressions which are here used, literally bring the whole compass of things into the believer's inheritance. His life is given to him by the Spirit of his Head; the world is placed at his feet by the providence of Christ; and his destiny for the future is secured by Him who is the Lord of the dead and the living.

Life is ours. In the deepest meaning of the word none live but those who are in Christ. The doom of death rests upon the unregenerate world, and the law of death reigns in their hearts and lives. *Dead while they live*, is the stern and true sentence upon all who have not experienced the quickening of the Spirit. The original gift of existence is no longer life. *I am come*, was the Redeemer's testimony, *that they might have life, and have it more abundantly*. And this saying of Christ—with all its more abundant meaning—must interpret the apostle's words. The christian may rejoice in having his life given back to him, freed from the condemnation that blighted it, and from the sin that marred its joy, and the vanity that rendered it a living death. He has found the secret of its glorious end; the mystery of his being

is solved, and he now lives to live for ever. His life in Christ is his own ; he has found himself in finding his Saviour ; his years and days and hours have now an unbounded value. He knows, indeed, that his life in the flesh will cease ; but sanctified by the indwelling Spirit, he feels that its end is gained. It is his own while it lasts, to be spent in the care of his soul, in the discharge of his duties, in working out the designs of God in his probation. And he knows that he has gained his life for ever ; that whensoever death shall end his days upon earth he will only pass from probation into the security of rest. In this life in Christ the christian may glory ; nor can his glorying ever be made void.

Christ's providence gives the christian *things present* : whether here the world be the creature, or the events that fill its history, the believer is in Him possessed of all.

He is free of the creaturely world : placed as it were in paradise again, reopened by Christ, there is no interdict placed upon his enjoyment, and no restraint save that restriction which is perfect freedom—the law that all must be enjoyed to the glory of his Lord. He is no longer in bondage to mammon, to lust, to intemperance, or to the creature in any more gross or more ethereal form of servitude. And that very redemption from the bondage of sense makes the world ours. So long as we are of the world, the world is our master, many masters in one ; but when we become

Christ's freemen, the whole economy of the creature pays us tribute. But, possessing all things, the servants of Christ must show that they are really masters of the creature by their temperate, thankful, and spiritual use of all things. So find they every creature of God good, and nothing to be refused ; so use they the world as not abusing it ; and nothing lovely in creation, nothing pleasant to the taste, nothing made to minister to man's physical wellbeing, but contributes to their happiness. They who pervert this benignant charter to their spiritual harm, and give back their affections to the things that perish, sin against the covenant of redemption and forget its prerogative : they are in danger of being brought into bondage again, and so of ceasing to be in Christ. Against this danger the scripture utters a clear, sharp, and ever-recurring admonition ; it warns us to show our mastership by training ourselves to independence of the things that perish ; and to maintain and perfect our sovereignty over the creature by making the discipline of our senses the means of our spiritual strength. But still the grand prerogative of the text remains in its integrity : *All things are yours*, and the *world* in all things.

The Redeemer's providence extends to *things present*, all the events that make up the course of this world. Here, also, He makes His people free. Not, indeed, that He gives them the control of passing affairs. He keeps the direction of our lives in His own hands, and does not always admit

His people into the reasons of His dealings. But in another sense, He makes them masters of their own providential course. He sanctifies their freedom of action; allows large latitude to their prayers; gives them the discretion to make events contribute to their own welfare; and in the infinite wisdom of His superintending care, causes all things to work together for their good. Here also the paradox holds: the most perfect submission to the will of Christ is the most absolute sovereignty over passing events. The believer is not in bondage to the inflexible course of destiny, and his peace is not at the mercy of whatever may betide. He is instructed—as St Paul elsewhere says—to fall in with the course of Divine appointment when it is independent of his own volition; and, always reconciled to providence, *things present* are always in his favour. His deep and tranquil reliance on his Saviour's wisdom and goodness keeps his heart and mind in peace that passeth understanding; and that peace is his sovereignty over all events. This is indeed a high ideal; but it is St Paul's, and it pervades the scripture. So far as we do not realise it, we have not risen into the height of our privilege, or sunk into its profound depth. *All things are yours*; and *things present* among the all things.

Death and *things to come* closes the whole. These also are ours who are Christ's; for Christ has the keys of the other world, and our eternal destiny is in His ever-faithful hands.

Death, the last and most dreaded enemy of life, is translated into a servant, into a ministering angel of light, to the faithful disciples of the Lord of life. Whenever, and under whatever circumstances, the visitation appointed unto man may come, we have our Master's covenant pledge that death shall be only dissolution, departure into paradise, and the sleep from time that is an awakening into eternity. To those who are not Christ's, who have no part in His new covenant of life, death is in prospect, and will be in reality, whether confessed or not, a despotic master, ruthlessly rending the spirit from all that it holds dear:—implacable, unmerciful. But to the christian death comes as an expected and welcome servant of the Lord's will, and one whom in his final triumph the dying saint makes his own servant also. He tolerates and smiles at the cold embrace that mars his body for a season; knowing that the dread messenger will serve his soul's deepest desire by admitting him to the presence of the Lord.

And *things to come*. This wonderful word, that stretches into paradise and into heaven and to infinity, sums up the christian's privilege. The middle world, the disembodied waiting for the great day, the great day itself, the resurrection, the final issues of a full redemption, the beholding of the glory of the Lord, the beatific vision of the adorable trinity in the eternal incarnate Son—all is condensed into one vast word, bearing its exceeding and eternal weight of glory, *things to come!*

The last time we heard it was from the Saviour's lips, when He promised that His Spirit should show His disciples things to come, the revelations, namely, of His covenant of grace and the promises of His glory. But He himself will be the last Revealer, and the inheritance that He hath prepared for them that love Him, and which in Him shall be their own for ever, we must die to know ; and only after death can He reveal them.

3. Finally, let us hear the apostle's exhortation, not expressed in words, but giving its glow to the whole spirit of His testimony, to render to our Lord and Saviour the glory of our homage and thanksgiving for His unspeakable gift. *He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.* Let us magnify the eternal love of Him who made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant that He might ransom us from our bondage, and raise us to so rich an heritage. Let us count all things but loss for the excellency of His knowledge. Let us by His grace renounce all, that we may be found in Him in life and in death and for ever. Let it be our study to be faithful stewards of the manifold grace of which He has made us heirs ; that, in due time, after we have passed through our probation of life, received all the blessings ministered to us in His kingdom of grace, and sealed our devotion in death, we may enter into the joy of our Lord : to whom, in the unity of the Father and of the Spirit be glory for ever. Amen.

XX.

THE DAWN OF THE GREAT DAY.

ROMANS XIII. 11, 12.

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep ; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand ; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

ST PAUL is here the watchman of the church. Standing between night and day, he proclaims *the time*: in tones of solemn joy he announces the end of darkness and the approach of light. Our first impression on hearing his cry is, that it summons the sleepers of a guilty world to awake, and join the watching church. But as we listen we find that he speaks to the watching church itself ; his words imply that the shadows were already fast departing, and the morning already far advanced. The seeming inconsistency cannot be removed by

supposing him first to address the children of the night, and then to encourage the children of the day. The two voices speak to one and the same company ; they blend together exhortations apparently appropriate to both characters ; and by the very combination they hint the only solution. This appeal regards the church as being in a midway state between perfect night and perfect day ; as a band of pilgrims awakened from sleep, but still surrounded by the slumberous influences of night not yet wholly gone ; waiting in the dawn for the revelations of the coming day, towards which they travel in hope, and for which they prepare in holiness.

These words, *the pilgrims of the dawn*, both borrowed from St Peter, greatly help us to understand a passage of St Paul, otherwise hard to be understood. They throw a clear light upon the whole paragraph, reconciling its two voices, resolving its apparent paradoxes, and imparting to the mingled exhortation a charm irresistible to every devout heart. Let us trace the effect of this keynote in the interpretation of the passage. The dawn proclaims the end of night ; it is in itself only the mingling of darkness and light ; but it is the sure promise of a day that cannot be retarded, that must reach its perfection, and upon which the shadows of evening shall never fall.

I. The apostle sets out with an appeal to the christian community : *Knowing the time.* The

word carries us back to our Lord's sublime proclamation of the hour that struck at His first advent, when the night of death that had rested upon mankind for ever ended, and the light of a new and eternal life began. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.* Another hour is yet to come, —not *now is*,—when all the dead in their graves shall hear His voice in the last resurrection. But the hour into which man's history entered when our Saviour spoke was the hour that marked the end of spiritual night and the beginning of spiritual day. The *time* of night then closed for the world at large; and to all who *know* the time, the dark reign of sin is over for ever.

Night passed from the world when our Lord came into it. Before His advent the true light had never shone. Doubtless the darkness that preceded His coming was not and never had been perfect night; dense, unrelieved, Egyptian darkness cannot be said to have encompassed the world since the first promise spoke into the gloom the prophetic, *Let there be light.* When Paradise was shut, something of its interdicted light remained outside to mitigate the darkness; so that in the deepest midnight of heathenism some rays of truth and instincts of virtue have struggled with the darkness; rays which, however inadequately comprehended, were never entirely absorbed: and over one favoured land the moon and the stars shone

brightly. The earlier revelation was, as St Peter tells us, a light shining in a dark place *until the day should dawn*. Thus there was from the beginning a preliminary kindling towards the morning. But the new testament arrogates for the first advent the prerogative of commencing the true light. Christ was Himself the dawn and morning-star of His own coming day. And the time which christians *know*, is the new era into which man's history has risen through the first appearance of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

When the apostle speaks of our knowing the time, he refers to an experimental acquaintance with its privileges, obligations, and responsibilities. How this knowledge is attained we learn in that memorable word which the prophet Isaiah gave the apostle Paul, and of which he makes such spirit-stirring use : *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light*. Here the Lord himself is the great Awakener, pouring the light of conviction into the chambers where sinners sleep the sleep of death,—that sleep to all good which is at the same time wakefulness to all evil. Those who hear His awakening voice, and receive the light of conviction, arise, but only to discover that they are themselves dead among the dead in trespasses and sins. They then receive from Him who awakened them the light of life. They leave the company of the spiritually dead, and find that He who had given them the light of conviction, and poured into their souls the light of

life, is there to go before them with the light of sanctification and guidance to eternal blessedness. And these are they who *know the time*.

To them the night, in its double empire, is past. They are no longer under the dominion of the leaden sceptre of the god of this world, who lulls his subjects into insensibility ; they are no longer under the dominion of the tyrannous sceptre of the god of this world, who excites his subjects to all rebellion.

They sleep no more. That voice of the Awakener has entered into the depths of their soul, and they have been aroused once and for ever. Their whole being has been seized by the strong and subtle power of truths that have set every faculty on the full stretch of life, and vigour, and trembling activity. They have sprung up from the deep sleep of unconsciousness into a clear perception of the tremendous realities that link time with eternity. The sense of sin has come upon them with the overpowering force of a new and bitter experience : as if an adder had stung them, their apathy is gone for ever. And they have seen the cross ; the unutterable scenes of that morning that redeemed the world have engrossed and filled their hearts. They have been plunged into the waters of a spiritual baptism, which have refreshed, and invigorated, and awakened them to the uttermost. They have a book in their hands that enchains their attention with an infinite variety of truths for ever deepening the excitement of their interest.

They have work to do that more than taxes every energy. And, above all, there is an expectation reigning in the morning air that keeps every thought alert;—the mystery that will be solved with the broadening day; the Person who is coming, surrounded by glories only less glorious than His own perfection; and all that His coming will bring to the fruition of His people's old desires, and the lighting up of new desires that shall have their fruition throughout eternity;—conspire to create a state of soul to which sleep is for ever impossible. These are they who truly *know the time*. Their night is gone, and they sleep no more.

And the guilty wakefulness of night is also past. The same Voice that disturbed their sleep summoned them to leave the company of the dead; to abandon for ever all fellowship with those who, dead while they live, and living while they are dead, make provision for the flesh, and serve it in its more refined or grosser lusts. The night is not quite gone; but the sacred morning sheds light enough around to reveal the hidden things of night, and make them for ever hateful. Not only are its more revolting abominations—those orgies of the flesh which darkness itself might be ashamed of—forsaken; but the entire course of life, as shown under the deep shadows of night, however innocent it may have once seemed, is renounced, and looked back upon as a vain though guilty dream. These watchers cannot indeed forget the past. It is part of their discipline to be haunted by the memory of

these dreams of sin and vanity so long as there is any possibility of relapsing into them. Until their souls shall need no longer to be kept humble and watchful, these remembrances of shame shall pursue them ; it will be the prerogative of eternity alone to blend all guilty memories into one deep sense of infinite obligation without the shame. But, though their memories are not purged of the remembrance of the dark deeds of night, their consciences are purged from the guilt of those deeds, and their souls are saved from complacency in them. They count the night as over for ever ; and walk *as in the day*, with the holy decorum and dignity that befit the light. They have *cast off the works of darkness* ; throwing aside their former practices, as if they were a garment covering the soul ; hating the habiliments of night, in which they slept, and dreamed, and sinned, but which are to be worn no more for ever. These are they who truly *know the time*. Their night is gone, and they sin no more.

So far we have caught the spirit of the apostle's appeal as expressing the idea of a complete severance between night and day. There is in the intention of grace a great gulf fixed between the one and the other : the light is divided from the darkness absolutely ; nor can they have any fellowship one with the other. This is the sublime ideal of christianity ; this is the high theory that runs through all its teaching. There is, therefore, an important sense in which the dawn is not a reality ; and, notwithstanding the gloom not yet entirely

dissipated, the night is gone as such; notwithstanding that the light is low and uncertain, the day is really come. Hence in the general current of new testament teaching two states, and only two, are broadly defined and distinguished: there are *children of night* and *children of the day*. Nor is any interval generally assumed between the *darkness* of sin and the *marvellous light* of holiness. But the peculiarity of our present passage is, that it gives special prominence to the spiritual phenomena of a certain interval of transition, which reality requires and the scripture never denies. Although the apostle does not say so, he means that the christian state is, at the best, in many respects, no better than *the dawn*.

II. The strain of the exhortation proceeds on the assumption that the night is only *far spent*, and that the day is only *at hand*. There are many in the christian fellowship of watchers who are not fully awake, and among them are retained many relics of the night not yet entirely forgotten. Moreover, there are the old enemies begotten of the darkness who still infest the early morning. And finally, the salvation of the entire company is, at the best, only *nearer* than when faith ended the night.

It might be supposed, from the tenor of the apostle's watchman-cry, that the whole band of pilgrims were slumbering, or at least only half awake: and that in their drowsiness they were

acting over again the sensual and contentious scenes of darkness. But his language is general only that it may find out the individual. There is from age to age a faithful succession of *watchers and holy ones* ; but the melancholy fact remains, that throughout the whole of this early morning estate of Christendom these notes of admonition are only too much needed. When the Bridegroom shall have begun His final approach, *all* shall be wakeful and watchful enough ; but till then the pilgrim company shall never, alas ! lack those who move in its watching procession *like men that dream*, and who defile the sanctity of opening day by unholy echoes of the night. These sad memorials that it is only the dawn meet us at every turn. While there are many who are awake to all the powers of the world to come, who have renounced the hidden things of darkness, and are walking in the light of the Lord, there are very many more in these days who need to have the watchman-cry rung loudly in their ears, lest they relapse into the profounder sleep of a second death, from which not even the great Awakener shall ever rouse them. Hence the very same clarion-note that sounds out of the church into the sleeping, riotous world, is heard for ever resounding within the church itself. And it is the charitable duty of those who fully know the time, to echo that cry. We must all be watchmen over our brethren's souls ; giving our slumbering fellows no rest until they have been plunged again into the bath of a

spiritual reinvigoration ; and giving our licentious companions no rest until they have put away their wantonness and strife. And here is the everlasting argument : It is *high time* to awake out of sleep ; let us walk *honestly, as in the day.*

It is only a variation on the same theme when we speak of the danger inseparable from the dawn. When the apostle here makes the garment of holiness—the mystical character of the Lord Jesus Christ put on—an *armour of light*, he suggests, by a single word, the whole mystery of evil that wars against the pilgrims of the dawn. The powers of darkness have not been scared away by the morning light. Rather they are awakened by it into more malignant alacrity. Never did they so furiously rage as around the sacred person of Him whose presence in the world ended their reign. And, although He abated their power, destroyed their dominion, and announced their final discomfiture, He did not banish them from the path of His pilgrim company. The time is not yet come when *these* unclean ones shall not pass over the way of holiness. When the day shall have fully risen upon the church, our enemies shall be seen no more for ever. Meanwhile, they haunt the morning, obstruct the travellers, and do much mischief to the more unwary. They cannot retard the day ; but they make its progress a perpetual contest ; so that its final perfection will not be simply a consummation, but a victory. And in this the spiritual day of man's history differs from

the natural. In the latter the dawn glows into morning, and morning melts into mid-day with silent and sure predestination: day vanquishes night without resistance, and the daily victory is won without strife. But in the former the victory is the result of a desperate and unintermitting warfare between spiritual light and spiritual darkness. Hence the apostle's exquisite condensation into one word of the entire panoply that he elsewhere loves to dilate upon in detail. It is the *armour of light*. The church's weapons of offence and defence are simply the light of a spiritual life. The victory will be the perfect light of universal holiness: the armour that insures and wins that victory is *light*.

Once more: it is characteristic of this midway state that the salvation of the christian company is regarded as incomplete. The perfect day will bring, with all its other mysteries of glory, a full salvation; but that, St Paul tells us, is only "nearer than when we believed." There is a sense, indeed, in which the salvation of mankind is already accomplished in all its perfection: neither time nor eternity can add to it or take from it. The reconciliation between God and the human race was, by one offering once offered, ratified for ever. But the bestowment of salvation on the members of Christ's mystical body is progressive, and will not be a perfect gift until one last crowning act shall seal and ratify an infinite series of lesser deliverances. The church upon earth is only in the dawn of the

day of its full redemption. That day will be perfect when Christ shall come "without sin unto salvation;" when He shall come no longer bearing the burden of His cross, but bearing the burden of His glory and of His exceeding great rewards. Then shall He consummate ten thousand acts of forgiveness by one great act of irreversible mercy *unto eternal life*. Now, in the dawn, our hope subsists on a pardon not yet eternally ratified. Then will He consummate the sanctification of His saints, rendering the warfare between flesh and spirit for ever impossible; releasing them from the last vestige of infirmity, and uttering the final decree, *Be holy still*. Now, in the dawn, we are dependent on the ceaseless ministry of that grace which still retains the basin and the napkin to wash the disciples' feet; we are encompassed about with such infirmities as make the full glory of christian perfection a state too high for time. Then will He execute the long-suspended judgment written against death and all its satellites of sorrow; recovering those whose bodies fell by the wayside, rendering death obsolete to the generation into which He shall come; and, after having reversed in these the decree that it is appointed unto all men *once to die*, He will *swallow up death* in the general victory, and obliterate from His people every trace that they had ever known this dread penalty of sin. Now, in the dawn,—but it is needless to dilate; Christ's people wrestle with sorrow, and mourn in bereavement, and prepare to die;

the physical nature of the redeemed does not as yet share even in the partial salvation which their spiritual nature attains. By ten thousand tokens of tribulation it is only the dawn—the early dawn—of the great day.

III. There can, however, be no question that the predominant tone of the passage is something higher than this : not ruled by the gloom of the dawn, but by its promise. It is full of the prophecy of the coming day ; and every word is strictly appropriate to an exhortation—an exhortation never suspended—to the company of watchers who travel towards while they wait for the coming of the Lord. They are stimulated to believe in the certainty of the perfect day ; to rejoice in the hope that it inspires ; and to occupy themselves meanwhile with all holy preparation.

Knowing the time. The christian church is appealed to as exercising a firm faith in the gradual consummation of the present dawn into perfect day. These words are a remembrancer : reminding these early travellers of the great secret which they know,—the most precious secret time has to disclose,—that the Lord is at hand, bringing with Him all, and more than all, their hope can conceive. The return of our Saviour—or, rather, His coming : for that is the scriptural word, as if His first appearance was but a transient visit—fills the entire new testament with a glow that leaves no part dark, brightens into all but glory the dimmes

of the church's present vexation, and already almost swallows up death in victory. To *know the time* is to know this its greatest secret. But the apostle uses here an expression that occurs nowhere else: one which, without overstraining it, yields a very important truth. The coming of Christ will be to His church—to His mystical, spiritual people—the regular and peaceful consummation of a day already begun: the same light and no other, but raised into meridian glory. To the ungodly world a catastrophe, and to slumbering christians a sore amazement, it will be to those who *wait for His appearing* what day is to the earthly traveller who waits for the morning. The elements of heaven are here; the dawn is the earnest as well as the pledge of the day; and all that will be needful for the redeeming of every pledge the scriptures contain is the withdrawal of the veil, the appearing of the Sun in the heavens, the *showing Himself* once more to His people. The apostle's words do not permit us to think of the christian world as being plunged into night again: *the night cometh* is never spoken of the church; only of the term of every individual's probation. One of the most impressive, and also the most common, *notes* of the christian community is this, that they *wait for His Son from heaven*. And, in every age, those are most in harmony with the scripture and the earliest disciples, who regard that as the one great prospect and future of the church.

But *knowing the time* does not signify any precise knowledge of its limits—at least its future limits. We know the human beginning of the time : but are forbidden even to investigate its human end. We are shut up to faith, which must in all things rule until the vision of Christ shall begin the reign of sight. It has pleased the Lord to keep this secret from every age, even from that of His elect apostles. The benefit of the uncertainty is one that every generation of His followers, from the first who saw His retreating glory, to the last that shall witness His second shaking of the heavens and earth, must partake. It is pure and simple faith. *All things continue as they were*, was the cry of dawning unbelief ; and that cry is not less shrill, and not uttered by fewer voices, because it is reinforced by eighteen centuries of added argument. Impatient credulity—the counterpart of that unbelief—cries, *Lo, here is the promise of His coming, or lo there!* But simple faith waits on in hope that makes no calculation. There is no necessary, secular cycle to be computed ; His return depends on His own will. The natural day may be subject of most precise calculation : we may ascertain on every meridian how many moments are yet from the dawn to the noon. But here the apostle's figure once more fails : our Lord may brighten any hour—from cock-crowing to the third hour and the sixth—into perfect day.

This being the common prospect, it is not wonderful that here, as everywhere, the christian

state is described as one of joyful hope. Nothing in nature is more beautiful and more symbolical of eager expectation than the dawn that proclaims, *The day is at hand*: the day itself that fulfils its promise cannot surpass its beauty. Here the figure is again, in a certain sense, insufficient: the day that we expect will be so glorious as to cause its early splendours to be forgotten. But the brightness is a great reality: the estate of Christ's watchers is one in which an enthusiastic hope may well predominate. To the company as such there is nothing but joy in the future: its present inheritance is a hope full of immortality, and that knows no night; for *in its pathway there is no death*. And the individual christian is taught to enter into the common hope. True that he has the cares of life, the conflict with evil, the fear of death, to moderate his joy. But he is taught—and is *slow of heart to believe*, if he is not effectually taught—to look through all and over all these lower glooms of his prospect to the brighter horizon into which these things merge. He must lose his particular sorrow in the general joy. He is one of the company that shall receive the Lord. He has come into their fellowship, and shall be separated from them no more. It may be that he will not be one of those who never taste of death. His own particular day may be followed by a certain night. He may be, and probably will be, buried by the holy wayside. But that accident of his lot will not sever him from his companions. His spirit will be with them still,

and his body shall be given back to him before the august meeting shall take place, in time to welcome the great consummation. Hence to the faith and hope of every believer in Christ the present life is the dawn of a perfect day.

But the apostle reserves for the last his solemn exhortation to prepare. And that exhortation is in harmony with the whole strain: *The day is at hand*; the pilgrims are travelling towards it; and their preparation for it is twofold. On the one hand, they are bidden to anticipate the day in the holy decorum of their lives; and on the other, to be clothed with the only garment worthy of the day, the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Let us walk honestly, as in the day: this one word *honestly* unites in itself every idea of dignity, decorum, and purity becoming the christian day; in opposition to the degradation and unholiness of the night in which the flesh had its dominion of shame. Although the glory of the perfect day is not yet revealed, its purity is already present. The high ideal of christian holiness is the living, through the effectual grace of God, under the light of a present heaven: under the eye of Him whose presence already throws the light of day around our souls. *The holy walk in the light, as He is in the light; they have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth them from all sin.* This is their fellowship: while in all the houses of the Egyptians around them there is deep darkness, in all their dwellings there is light.

They tolerate nothing in themselves that the light of day would rebuke. Hence it is the counterpart of this that they *make no provision for the flesh*: whatever provision they take for their heavenly journey, the flesh has no share in it. The sin adhering to their nature, the *old man* not yet dead, is an enemy whose hunger they do *not* feed, to whose thirst they do *not* administer drink, whose dying solicitations they regard not, but leave him to *perish in the way*. But the supreme preparation—uniting all others in one—is the *putting on of the Lord Jesus Christ*. In Him alone the dignity and purity of our nature meet: transformed into His character, we need nothing more to fit us for the holiest heavens; but nothing less will suffice His expectation at His coming. He will come *to be glorified in His saints*, already the likeness in ten thousand reproductions of Himself; and they shall in turn *be glorified in Him*. Hence the great business of the pilgrims is to occupy the precious moments of the morning in weaving into their nature the character of Christ, as the apparel of the eternal day. And if in faith that worketh by love—the love that fulfilleth the law—they diligently co-operate with the Holy Spirit, it will be His blessed function to see to it that before the Bridegroom cometh, His Bride, and every individual soul that makes up her mystical person, shall be found clothed in His spiritual perfection as with a *garment without seam, woven from the top throughout*.

Beyond this we cannot go. This is the close and the secret of the whole exhortation to the pilgrims of the dawn. They have come up out of the night at the sound of His awakening voice ; and have left their Egyptian darkness for ever. They are wrestling with the dangers of the morning, rejoicing in its partial satisfactions. But supremely and above all they are intent upon the coming day : *in their pathway there is no death*, but they wait for the *more abundant life* ; they are full of trembling and solemn expectation of all that the day will pour out of its unfathomable mysteries. But the *end* of all their expectation is the Person of their Lord. And to prepare for Him by being like Himself is the sum of all their preparation.

XXI.

THE NEW SONG.

REV. v. 9.

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.

ST JOHN closes the new testament with a revelation of the Lord on His throne in the heavens. Like St Luke, he is inspired to carry on his narrative of what Jesus began to do and teach, but with a different scope. While the evangelist describes the reign of the risen Jesus in the church below, the apostle beholds Him upon His throne, and limits his continuation of the Redeemer's life to the scene behind the veil. He had waited long until the Lord, according to His promise, came to him; all his apostolic companions, witnesses with him of the holy life, had gone; and now before he

departs in peace he sees the Lord Christ in His glory. And what he sees he is commanded and empowered to write. St Paul, sharer of his rapture into the heavens, saw and heard unutterable things, but durst not leave the record of his vision. St John, the last apostle, and to the last the most favoured, beheld a revelation which he saw for us as well as for himself.

The most glorious of his visions, and that one which we can contemplate in his book with least danger and most edification, is the homage of which the glorified Redeemer was the object. Let us reverently follow him while he describes, as a witness without comment, the *new song*: that worship which was new in its scene and circumstances; new in the manifestation of its object; new in the inspiration from which it sprang.

I. The worship we behold, the song we hear, is new, as offered in a new temple and by worshippers never united before. It is offered in heaven and not up on earth; and it is peculiar to heaven as the intermediate sphere of Christ's mediatorial reign.

1. We are transported to the other world. Here St John describes the last accomplishment, this side the great day, of the promise given by our Lord to His first disciples, *Ye shall see the heaven opened*. After all past literal and spiritual illustrations of that early prophecy of the new creation, we find its fullest meaning here: *A door is opened*

in heaven; and we in the lower courts, dim with the gloom of time, hear the rejoicing in the inner sanctuary of our Father's house. Why have we this privilege?

For the gratification of our holy desire to know what passes in the world to which we hasten, heaven is revealed to the vision of our faith: the object of our deepest hope is, as it were, made manifest to our eyes. The church of Christ contemplates in this book a glorious succession of sights which bring heaven down to earth. Enough is disclosed to make the great future a blessed reality, and to kindle to higher intensity the desire that the revelation satisfies. These visions are to us all what the predictions concerning Christ were to the few elect prophets of old. They beheld the day of Christ and were glad; while still they searched diligently what and what time the Spirit did signify. We have seen the sufferings of Christ, and now behold in prophetic vision the *glory that should follow*. We also have to search diligently what *manner of time* the Spirit signifies; but the *what* already rewards our search. We see Jesus exalted; and so far as it is possible below, we are made familiar with the scenes of His higher life, even as we know those of His life upon earth. The God of hope has not left our hope without witness. *It is enough.*

To teach us also the essential unity of the worship of heaven and earth. *We are come unto mount Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem*; and that communion

of saints in which our creed rejoices, but which so much disappoints us below, becomes, when we look through this gate of heaven, a high and sacred reality. There is the same supreme object of worship, the triune God, revealed through the Lamb in the midst of the throne ; the same atoning sacrifice is the theme of rejoicing ; the same mediatorial Redeemer is magnified ; and the same unspeakable gratitude to His love reigns in the upper as in the lower courts. The worshippers remember the earth where their sins were pardoned and their robes were washed ; and which they hope to see again. They blend our praises and even our prayers with their own ; and show us what perfect worship is when differences and discord are forgotten for ever. Their strains of adoration are the language of earth transferred to heaven, and echoed on earth again. And there at least we learn what is the precious secret, unknown below, of the one family in Christ. There is the unity we believe in and long for.

And we may add that their high service is our standard. To regulate our worship are these visions given. As the will of God is to be done on earth as it is done in heaven, so also is the service of homage to be rendered. The doctrine of the church's ministry of worship finds here its highest illustration. The manner of the service is new ; its heavenly ritual is clothed in symbols so mysterious as to baffle the thought of imitation on earth ; but the song is plain, and, as the centre

and consummation of the new worship of the other world, gives us the measure to which our worship should aspire.

2. The scene of this song is new, not only as taking us beyond this world, but also as it is the intermediate sphere of our Lord's government, in which He is surrounded by a circle of worshippers never assembled before.

The Redeemer in the visions of the Apocalypse has passed into a new stage of His mediatorial career. He has indeed received the heavens, where we behold Him in the Acts and in the Epistles ; but it was reserved for this last book to give a closer definition of His glorious court in the other world. It is heaven, for He is at the right hand of the Father, and in the centre of the universe ; but it is heaven which has yet to be made the *new heaven* by the utmost manifestation of His glory. Paradise it is not, for when He rose again from the kingdom of the dead, paradise rose with Him to a higher glory. But it is not yet that seventh and perfect heaven which will be common to Him and His redeemed people, to be opened only when His great day, already advancing fast, shall have reached its noon. Meanwhile, He waits, in the exercise of His redeeming sovereignty, until that *end shall have come*. As He is the object of the new worship which we now contemplate, He has only reached a new but not the final sphere of His glorification.

The same lesson we are taught when we turn

from the Object to the worshippers themselves. These form a new congregation, which Christ's ascension has gathered round Him, and described by our witness in all their new characteristics. The angels are still foremost, in their thousands ten thousand times multiplied worshipping our Redeemer, in homage to Him, and in sympathy with us. The cherubim are there also, not as when overshadowing the mercy-seat below they silently symbolised all the creatures of God, but actively joining in the common tribute. The elders are there, representatives of the elect of both churches made one, and of the whole redeemed race. And while the seer beheld, and while we behold, the multitudes of the disembodied host crowd to the scene, in person and not by their representatives. Thus all is new: new to the ancient worshippers of heaven, new to the redeemed who now first join them, new to the saints who daily and hourly enter within the veil, new to the seer who wrote the word, and new to us who hear it. This intermediate scene of the Redeemer's sway was, in all senses, a new revelation to the church; and it will continue the same until that day come when it also shall, in some respects, be numbered amongst the *old things that have passed away*.

II. The chief interest of the word, however, springs from the new manifestation of God in redemption that it extols. Throughout the scrip-

ture each development of the wonderful counsel of God gives birth to new songs ; and by this word we may trace the melody of the church's ever-augmenting gratitude throughout the long succession of His revelations of His grace.

The song we hear extolled the accomplishment of human redemption. As such it was the continuation and final close of the hymn to the incarnate and suffering Redeemer which had ruled the psalmody of heaven and earth from the Fall. When it began in heaven we know not ; but we hear it throughout the scriptures, which testify of His coming. It is the melody which the Bible makes everywhere in its heart to the Lord. It first proclaimed from age to age a coming Deliverer ; that song became old, and a new one extolled His advent ; and now the hymn of the incarnation, which indeed can never become old, receives its perfection when it glorifies the attainment of the great end of the incarnation, the redemption of the human race. That song, the new song, began in heaven : for only a few upon earth knew the mystery of the passion, and none knew it in all its meaning, when the Redeemer left the earth. Nor can we at our best estate of knowledge and devotion extol the finished work of the eternal wisdom and justice and mercy with the same insight into its glory that is vouchsafed above. The song of creation was also heard by the apostle, and he has taught us that that display of the divine glory can be magnified worthily only in heaven. Much more is the song

of redemption reserved for that higher scene. There only can it be set to fitting music ; and hence the new song, *Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood*, with its variations in this book, remains the standard and text of our feebler echoes upon earth. A new song when St John heard it, it will be new for ever.

Although the immediate act of homage which the apostle here records was offered to the Redeemer, as we shall see, it becomes us first to consider the tribute that it pays, as the sequel of another strain, to the new manifestation of the triune God. The holy trinity had been worshipped in heaven since worshippers were ; but, in the accomplishment of human redemption, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in the unity of the divine nature, are the one object of a new song. The apocalyptic hymns begin by echoing the old doxology, which proclaimed the veiled mystery in the ancient temple ; *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come*. But this was when the Creator was adored. Now that the finished redemption becomes the theme, the tribute is paid to *Him that sate upon the throne*, to the *Lamb standing as if it had been slain*, and to the *Seven Spirits sent from Him into all the earth*. Through the mystery of this symbolical language we clearly see the trinity as revealed in the mediatorial work : the eternal Father, to whom neither here nor elsewhere is any

form or likeness assigned ; the incarnate Son, as a sacrifice once slain, but standing, now to be offered no more, in the midst of the throne, and therefore in the centre of the triune glory, yet Man also who can break the roll upon the seal ; and the Seven Spirits, the Perfect Eternal Spirit of God, who is the Redeemer's sevenfold Eye going up and down the earth. The manifestation of the trinity in the Redeemer's work was new ; pervading the theology of the church below, it is a mystery which is more clearly though yet dimly revealed above. It will give, it may be, through eternity a new character to the exhibition of the godhead ; but here the exhibition is adapted to the mediatorial dispensation. It is a new song, and, with whatever changes sung, will be new for ever.

But the personal glory of the Redeemer gives this worship a peculiar characteristic that must be distinctly dwelt upon. It might almost seem as if the scene that St John beheld was the assumption of our incarnate Head into His glory, and the worship he heard was offered to the majesty of His glorified form : thus supplementing, as it were, the record of our earthly histories, which do not penetrate behind the veil when He is received up. *He entered into His glory*, we are told : His own glory, the glory of His divine nature shining through His perfected humanity, and making Him a new object of contemplation to the heavenly world who had beheld Him only in His humiliation and agony. *Seen of angels* always, they had wondered to what

His incarnation would grow, and what would be that higher dignity than their own to which the nature of their useful fellow-worshippers would be raised. And now they join with the elders of the older covenant to behold and adore this great sight—this *Wonder in heaven*; and St John beholds afar the reality of that which he and his brethren gazed wistfully into heaven to see, but saw not. It is true that the song is sung to the Lamb that had been slain—always to the Lamb—to teach that the glory of the incarnation was the sacrifice of the cross, and that, without the tokens of His passion, our Lord must never be adored. But we must remember the manifestation that throws its glory over the first page of this book: that Form of dreadful majesty which proclaimed His own divinity by the words, that none but God could use while He bore witness to His humanity by wearing the semblance and features of glorified man; and before Whom, in His new majesty, the man greatly beloved fell down as one dead. That Being did not raise His servant and bid him *worship God*: He proclaimed His own omnipotence and grace, and received the homage that was His due. That same Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, is the Lamb who is magnified in this new song: *Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever.*

The Redeemer's exaltation, however, is not personal only; it is also official, and the new son

heralds Him into the exercise of His mediatorial supremacy. The vision here goes back to the old testament, and borrows from it much of its imagery : Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Daniel are all interpreted by the last and greatest prophet. After the sublime act of homage to the Creator was witnessed by the seer in silence, the book of God's redeeming government, sealed in sevenfold mystery, is seen in the right hand of Him that sate upon the throne. No creature was found worthy either to open or to look upon that book ! the Eternal would not open it, no mortal could open it ; He who alone could administer the affairs of men was the incarnate mediator, both God and man in one. While the apostle weeps much, and wonders where the Lord is, the elder tells him that the Root of David had prevailed : and his vision is cleared to behold the mystery, and to see Him whose absence he mourned. He saw what he and his brother apostles had already taught below, that the Lamb of God, crucified for the sins of the world, had, in the might of His sacrificial obedience, conquered the enemies of God and man, and redeemed the race of mankind. The glory of the scene is not marred by any more direct allusion to those enemies : suffice that, when He took the book, the representatives of our race burst into the song, the new song, which cries, *Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof ; for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.*

Then follow the multitude of the heavenly host, adding to the human gratitude of that strain their own angelic prediction : *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.* Lastly, the same chorus, slightly varied, is taken up by the whole universe in this mystic scene,—the whole creation echoes : *Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever.* The first singers, our representatives, who have waited for the close of this triune doxology, utter their Amen, and, whilst they offer their profoundest worship to the Living Lord, the veil is drawn upon this sublime inauguration. The new song, extolling finished redemption, adoring the triune manifestation of God, paying homage to the glory of the Incarnate, and announcing His reign begun, ceases in the hearing of the apostle, but it continues still, a new song until the end of time.

III. The song which was sung in the new temple, and in honour of a new object, was sung also under a new inspiration. Let us meditate upon this in relation to the worshippers to whom St John refers, and then consider its application to ourselves.

1. The joy that is in heaven passes human description and human thought. But that there is a new joy in the presence of the angels, filling the hearts of angels and men alike, though from different

sources, is plain from every word in the Apocalypse. The multitudes of the heavenly host find their delight not only in the vision and adoration of God, but also in the contemplation of His works, and especially in the study of His manifold wisdom as displayed in the history of redemption. Though their obligation is not as ours, and they are without the deepest inspiration of gratitude for salvation from sin and from hell, they join us in adoring the divine perfections in the government of the universe: not of like passions with us in earthly things, they are of like sentiment with us in all that is heavenly. The exaltation of Christ, their Lord and ours, our Redeemer and not theirs, gave a new element to their happiness and a new theme for their rejoicing. In beholding Him crowned with glory and honour to whom they had ministered in His low estate, they have the reward of ages of faithful service. Moreover, they now unite with men from the earth in the same new worship; long had they united with them in the expectation of Paradise, but now first they are fellow-citizens with the saints, and united with men in the same family of God. But of them we can say no more; of our own representatives in this new song we have a surer knowledge.

The human worshippers in heavenly places sing their songs with a new inspiration. But to estimate how true this is, we must remember that the joy of man in heaven is not limited to the scene that St John depicts. He gives us but one glimpse,

but what we then behold is but the beginning ; the spirits of the just made perfect were already there in countless multitudes, as we are told, and their number has been swelling onward from that day to this, filling fast the many mansions of our Father's house.

They join the song with the full gratitude of an accomplished salvation. They praise still the same redeeming grace : *Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood* ; but now they pour forth their gratitude under the inspiration of perfect security. Now they can add a third word to their former ascription : *Thou hast made us kings and priests unto God*, and conquerors over sin and death for ever. Their election is now final and irreversible, and their gratitude has in it an element that this side death it can never have, that of the enjoyment of a full salvation. Their happiness is now unmingled, not, as in this life, a trembling joy, alternating with fear and mingled with sorrow. Their songs are no longer songs in the night ; their penitential psalms are over, and they sing *a new song*.

They rejoice also in a more intimate fellowship with their Lord. In this life they gloried in their Saviour, whose face they saw, and whose words they heard, and whose grace they tasted by faith. He was with them, though oftentimes they knew it not ; but at best they praised an unseen and comparatively distant Saviour. Now they see the King in His beauty ; they are with Him, and for ever

with Him ; they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and will never cease to follow Him until He lead them back to earth again, and thence to the highest heavens. They rejoice in Him as they never could rejoice before ; He hath wiped the tears from their faces, and given them by His mercy in death confidence against the day of judgment. He blesses them with the earnest of their full beatitude, when He shall have restored to them their flesh ; and the song they sing is on all these accounts a new song.

Moreover, they are exalted to a nearer contemplation of His government, and of His unfolding designs, and of the times and seasons that roll on towards the great day. All was mystery below, and much is mystery still, but they are in the very presence of the Hand that guideth all things, and as they watch the process of their Master's government, they extol all that they behold. We dare not too literally interpret the hints of this wonderful book : the hints of adoring suspense and prayerful expectation, and inquiries still answered among our kindred in heaven. But enough is told to assure us that they turn all things to joy that cause us amazement, and share their Lord's sublime tranquillity, waiting for the end. They have watched from the beginning the course of what we call the church's history ; but to them its annals are very different. They have seen and rejoiced in the slow gathering of the nations, and their songs are blended of adoration for the past and

anticipation of the things that shall be. But their songs are ruled by one great central principle, the adoration of their Lord, God still manifest in the flesh ; and all combine in one new song.

2. And what have we to do with this? Why have we this door opened in heaven, and kept ever open, that we may hear this new and manifold song?

Like St John himself, we must be encouraged to rehearse and learn it for ourselves. He came down from his Patmos elevation, as he came down from Mount Tabor, but not to forget what he had seen and heard. He was still in the Spirit, though he no longer heard these unutterable things ; and we know by the opening doxology of this book what strain it was that lingered in his ears. We also are learning the same song. It is our blessed privilege to sing in these our probationary days of sorrow, and conflict, and salvation not yet finally secure, the song of confident assurance: *Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to them be glory and dominion for ever.* Redemption from our guilt through faith in the atonement ; salvation from our defilement through the washing of His Spirit purchased by His blood ; the priestly consecration of dominion over our own souls in the strength of union with Himself,—these are the three-one blessings which we may rejoice in by an assured experience in this lower world. If we are taught that song by the

Spirit here, and hold fast our confidence unto death, we shall one day sing it new in our Saviour's kingdom.

Meanwhile the singers of this song are constantly passing from the outer courts, where they rehearse it, into the Holiest. Each moment adds a new voice to the harmony of heaven, and not one added voice that the Redeemer's ear does not distinguish. The ransomed of the Lord are returning to Zion, not merely one by one, but in ever-increasing tribes, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. This door of hope in our valley of Achor gives us a glance that should comfort our life by showing what death is : that it is to the prepared only a passage for his soul, with the same uninterrupted song, scarcely faltering in death, into the presence of Christ and the saints who wait for him. The melody of joy in conscious salvation from sin, death has no power to disturb. Happy they whose life is gladdened by this joy, and who daily prepare for the better rejoicing.

Finally, there is a new song for which both saints on earth and saints in heaven are alike preparing. The song with which the whole company of the redeemed shall enter into the joy of their Lord, sung by the saved as they pass into their full consummation of body and soul, when the judgment is past and the final glory of heaven is attained, we shall all together sing. Those worshippers without us will not be made perfect. That final hymn ear hath not yet heard, nor hath it yet entered into

the heart of man, whether in heaven or earth, to conceive. It cannot be sung till all the singers are made ready; nor shall it be heard but in the new Jerusalem, where He that sitteth upon the throne shall for the last time say, *Behold I make all things new.*

THE END.

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