

ALL PARTS OF THE TRUTH NECESSARY

It is needful to look at the various aspects of wisdom as they come before us one after the other in our daily readings of the Scriptures. We do well to look earnestly into each as it comes, and not trust to the special tastes that would incline us to attend only to particular things. We are almost all of us more or less lop-sided. That is, our mental organisation leans a little too much one way or other, from which we get a bias that would incline us too much to one particular line of truth. Some like hard facts; some beautiful sentiments. Some delight in political prophecy while having no taste for personal godliness. Others are all for zeal and devotion, while they have a shrinking, or at least a lack of taste for everything requiring exact thought or reckoning. Some again have a taste for sombre themes; others, for those that are full of brightness and joy.

These preferences come from partial development. For every part of truth there is a time and a place; and every part blended is needful to a perfect result. In this respect, it is like light. Light is a mixture of seven differently coloured elements. When any of them is absent, we have a defective light. Truth is compared to light, and it is like it in this respect—that it is composed of a variety of ingredients, the leaving out of any of which will interfere with the result.

The part of truth before us this morning in the Ecclesiastes reading is of a sombre aspect. It is disliked by some people on this account; but these are not wise. Let us have that which is true in its own place, however sad it is. Is it not true that “*all things come alike to all;*” “*that there is one event to the righteous and the wicked, to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean?*” Is it not “*an evil among all things that are done under the sun*” that “*the heart of the sons of men is full of evil? That madness is in their heart while they live, and, after that, they go to the dead?*” Is it not so, that “*the sons of men are snared in an evil time*” that “*the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise nor riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to all?*” In a word, speaking with a wide racial sweep, do we not come into being with vanity and depart in darkness? Is not all vanity and vexation of spirit?

The Bible is the only book that propounds this doctrine to us. All other books would ask us to think that man is an angel of light in the nature inside of him, and that there is always the possibility, with proper circumstances, of his blooming out into goodness and joy and wellbeing. Experience, long enough extended, tells us that the Bible is true and that the romancing books are deceivers. There is no real romance in life. It is all a thing of grimness and futility at the bottom. Our best natural writers see and confess this. Carlyle speaks of human life as being encircled with a dark ring of necessity which draws ever closer till it devours us or something to that effect. It is true, all go unto one place; it is only a question of time. Turn up your old letters, where are the writers? Look into the file of old newspapers a hundred years ago; where is “the public” of those days that were flaunting themselves in print in all the fussiness and apparent reality of the generation now pouring down our streets.

But all this by itself would be distressing. It is truth, but it is only part of truth. It is the only part that we know as natural men. We want the other part that the Bible only can supply. We want to know why all this is, and what will be the upshot of it all. Why is mankind such a failure? Why is all “*vanity and vexation of spirit*”? Mere philosophic writers can tell us nothing; the Bible tells us everything. It shows us that in the beginning, man was made for God and not for himself only, and that man refused that submission to God in which God finds His pleasure, and that therefore man was driven off for a while into separation and alienation and death. Man in his pride may not like this explanation, but it is the explanation, there is no other. There are many attempts to find another, they are bound to be failures, for

Christ is the Truth, and this is endorsed by him. What can the highest intellects do with a problem in the nature of things inscrutable with the highest intellect? How can man find out the ways of God? It is no new thing for the wisdom of this world to grope around here in vain. *"The world by wisdom knew not God"* in the days of Paul (1 Cor. 1:21), and it has made no advances in that direction ever since. After the deepest search and the most soaring flights, man is bound to return with wearied faculties and confess that he cannot tell why man should be such a failure.

The Bible's explanation is not only simple but it is reasonable, and it is all sufficient. We need not go further. Man is made for God, and he is away from God and cannot be happy. Man is at war with the law of wisdom. The natural condition of his wellbeing is submission to this law. No marvel then that *"the misery of man is great upon him."* The wages of sin is death, and man is everywhere a sinner; no wonder that death reigns, and that his lot during life is the hapless one we know it to be. This is the explanation of the whole matter. It is best once for all to make full surrender. It will end the mental aches and wearinesses that sweep like cloud-masses over the spirit as we survey the wide-welter of human misery and fatuity; not that the mere explanation of the misery will end the misery. By no means, but that this explanation brings with it the hope that is linked with it and which exists in no other direction. The divine explanation not only tells us that human life is in darkness because of separation from God, but that God has purposed and is actually bringing about a reversal of this calamitous state of things, and invites every willing mind into the channel of the process. The beginning and the end of this matter go together and cannot be separated. If God has showed us the beginning of darkness with Adam, he has given us a pledge and a beginning of light with Christ:

"Whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised him from the dead."

He has not only made known to us the entrance of sin into the world and death by sin, but He shows us in vision the time when *"there shall be no more death."* The line of revelation reaches from the banishment of man from Eden into alienation to an era of joyful recall when—

"The Tabernacle of God shall be with men, He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself shall be with them and be their God."

Here is light and the joy of hope. No other book but the Bible gives us this. And it is not a speculative hope. It is not a maybe. It is not even promise merely. There was a time when it was only promise. In our day, the promise is largely fulfilled. Christ has come and manifested the Father's name among men. He has set us a historical monument which no man can overturn. He has fulfilled the prophetic forecast, not only in his own birth, life, works, death, and resurrection, but in the accomplished programme of events among men during the past 1,800 years. It is easy, under the circumstances, to believe in the second part of his work, that coming again in power and great glory, to take unto himself all power and to reign, which shall consummate the stupendous work the Father has given him to do.

The state of things depicted in Ecclesiastes is the state of things actually existing upon the earth for the time being. The recognition of it is part of wisdom: but it requires the companion picture of our second reading to give it the right adjustment in the scheme of things. It gives the necessary background to the exhibition of the glory of God, but, without the glory of God, it would be mere vacuity and darkness. That glory is especially visible in the apostolic writings from which we have read (Acts 8). Here we have Philip *"preaching Christ"* to the Samaritans, what was this but preaching the glory of God? As Paul expresses it in writing to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 4:6),

"The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

We have the same Philip preaching it to the eunuch (Acts 8:35), and we note that the eunuch *“went on his way rejoicing.”* What it was that made him rejoice we know when we know the Truth in its fulness. That which made the eunuch rejoice will make us rejoice if we surrender our hearts in knowledge and faith. We have just the same reason to rejoice that he had. How great that reason is, and how unjust we are to ourselves if we do not give way to it! It is not a reason that quite lays hold of our present experience. The gospel does not propose to make us the happiest of people now, that is, as regards the outward circumstances that are supposed to lead to happiness. On the contrary, as Paul had to acknowledge,

“If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable.”

Jesus also, in his invitations to association with himself, did not propose beds of ease in this present life. He said,

“Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

It is,

“Blessed are ye that weep now;”

“Blessed are ye that hunger now;”

“Blessed are ye that mourn;”

“Blessed are ye when men shall hate you and when they shall separate you from their company and shall reproach you and cast out your name as evil.”

All Christ's representations of the state to which the Truth subjects men in the present life portrays that *“great tribulation”* out of which the resplendent multitude that John saw in vision had come.

It is inevitable that it should be so. The Truth is a call to self-denial on many heads. It is the discipline of self-denial that hews men into that noble shape that fits them for divine use in the Age to come. You know how odious, even to me, is the man who never denies himself, but gives in to every passing freak of desire. How much more odious it must be to God.

“The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world.”

So says Paul (Titus 2:11). So also Peter:

“Be sober and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, but, as He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.”

Here is one source of the affliction that belongs to the high calling to which men are called in Christ Jesus. Another is to be found in the aversions that the Truth creates towards those who obey the Truth. Ungodly men do most keenly resent the reflection implied in the separateness for Christ that the Truth imposes. *“Come out from among them;”* you could not hurt them more. They *“reproach you,”* as Jesus says, and *“cast out your name as evil.”* What are we to do? If we are weak-eyed in the things of the Spirit, we shall fear men and try to propitiate them, and be neither one thing nor another. This will be a mistake. You cannot propitiate them except by being out-and-out one of themselves. If you are this you cannot belong to Christ. If you are half-and-half, you please neither him nor them. It is best to be thorough, but with all courtesy. Even the enemies of Christ will respect you more if you are thorough than if you mince and trim and try to appear to belong to them when you don't.

Why, then, should the eunuch go on his way rejoicing? And why should we, like him, *“rejoice in the Lord always”*? Because of the great things to which our submission to the Truth introduces us. Oh, how great, even now!

“I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters.”

"The Father Himself loveth you."

The first effect of this happy change is the forgiveness of our sins. Is not this something to be glad about—that our sins are blotted out, and that we stand clean and accepted in Christ, the beloved mediator, and recognised "*joint heirs with him*" of the boundless goodness of the endless ages to come? This is truly an unspeakable consolation when the mind lays hold of the truth that is. "*The peace of God that passeth all understanding*" diffuses itself throughout the mental man where such a faith exists. "*Even now are we the sons of God,*" this means that we are now guided and directed and controlled in our affairs.

Our foolish hearts are liable to stand in our way here. We are apt to feel as if it could not be. When our eyes open to the enormous magnitude of the earth, to the inconceivable bulk and distance of the sun, to the appalling vastness of the universe of suns and worlds beyond, we are staggered and think the idea of God attending to our little selves and our little affairs is out of the question. What is the cause of this thought? Examine and you will find it is this—the attributing to God of our littleness and weakness. We would not do so avowedly, but actually this is our secret assumption. We unconsciously reason that because, if, with our little power, we had to manage the stupendous affairs of the universe, we could not attend to the details of personal cares; therefore, it must be so with God. Let us get rid of all feelings of this kind, they are the aberration of fallacy. The universe is one. The strength underlying it is one. This strength is God in His immensity. There is no limiting or exhausting of His power. Not only is nothing too great, but nothing is too small for Him. A sparrow cannot fall without Him. The hairs of your head are all numbered. Your affairs are not beneath His notice.

"Commit thy way unto the Lord and He shall direct thy steps."

Need you trouble how? You cannot understand His way, even in the most familiar things. Know ye what thought is? Know ye what light is? Know ye what life is? Can you conceive to yourself the two most elementary facts of time and space? If you cannot ought is? Know ye what light is? Know ye what life is? Can you conceive to yourself the two most elementary facts of time and space? If you cannot understand, but only take note of these common phenomena of being, why not take note of the higher authenticated phenomena, though they may elude your understanding!

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not to thine own understanding."

If all our sins are forgiven, if our ways are directed through this momentarily dark labyrinth of time, and if at the end of our weary journey, there waits a "*far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,*" which will appear to burst upon our eyes as soon as they are closed at death: and if beyond that culmination, there stretches away into the infinite distance the endless ages of perfect being in which our joy will never pall—our strength never decay, but our path shine brighter and brighter in the eternal felicity of unity with the everlasting strength and perfection and wisdom of God through Christ—have we not reason unutterable for doing as the eunuch did—"going on our way rejoicing"? It is only the darkness of the night and the weakness of our minds that admits of any faltering, and God, who knows our weakness, forgives the faltering, for it is in weakness that the foundation is laid for the great glory that is to give joy to both God and man. "*My grace,*" said Jesus to Paul (and it was written for those who should come after), "*is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore,*" he adds "*will I glory in my infirmities.*" "*Our light affliction*" will not, by enlightened reason, be laid in the balance for a moment against the result that is being worked out for us by its means. How poor are all human achievements by comparison with what God is working in us by the Truth. How insignificant and intrinsically worthless are all human movements and contrivances outside the channel of God's work in Christ. They shine and impress in a certain way only the generation that is contemporary with them, but, judge them by the result—they are the mere burnished tinsel on

coffin lids, destined to be forgotten utterly like the dust and cobwebs that gather in the darkness of the vault of death. The Word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the Word which by the gospel has been preached unto us.

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