

OUR FRINGE OF BLUE

It is well we have not been left to our own inclination in this matter of assembling together for the weekly memorial of Christ in the breaking of bread. It is well it has been made a matter of command. It is well we are obliged to come. If it were not so, feeling would often lead us to stay away, the frequency would easily increase, until we should cease altogether, with the result of spiritual death. Spiritual life is an affair of remembering spiritual things with the vividness and power that leads to action: and this remembrance is an affair of renewing those impressions that constitute memory, and this renewal of the mental picture of things can only be accomplished by periodical contact with the things that make the picture in the first instance. When memory of truth is excited, motive is powerfully affected: it is forgetfulness or unbelief that leads to spiritual decay.

If we could suppose ourselves with Christ in the day when he was upon the earth, we should be enabled to see many things in a different light from what they appear in when looked at in circumstances of our ordinary life. Many things that distress us would lose their power to do so: many things we care for would cease to interest; some things we hate would suddenly fall neutral, unless, indeed, they were things hateful to us for divine reasons—as there are such things, as when David says,

“Do not I hate them that hate thee: yea, I hate them with a perfect hatred,” or as when Paul tells us to *“Abhor that which is evil.”*

These we would hate with all the more heartiness for being in Christ’s company. But as regards the things of common life, we should certainly have the edge taken off most of our feelings, and our views wonderfully changed in form and complexion.

If this is true with regard to the first coming of Christ, how much more with regard to his second coming, to which we are hastening with every tick of the clock. That second coming will change our relations to everything going to constitute our present life. It will change the nature of that life in so far as it will change the mortal and corruptible. Changing our nature, it will change the nature of our sympathies and appreciations with the certain effect that things human will appear small and valueless, and things divine of overpowering reality and consequence. It will take away business care, family responsibility, and all susceptibility to human opinion. The men we know; the affairs that have vexed or interested us; the town we inhabit, the circle we move in, the age we live in, the books we have read, the politics of the day, the movements that have engrossed public attention will all be annihilated for us by the simple fact that Christ is in the earth to take all power to himself, and remodel human life in harmony with divine principles and laws—destroying the wicked, and glorifying the righteous. Now, whatever helps us to mentally realise this result beforehand helps us to walk through the desert of present life with a lighter step. Both our cares and our pleasures we shall take more easily and more innocuously if we remember Christ in the past and in the future. This double memory is held up to us in the breaking of bread. We look through the windows before and behind. Naturally, our minds are as a chamber without light, walls built up, having no window. Knowledge cuts a window in the wall—history in the back wall, prophecy in the front wall. Through these windows we look and see what was before invisible, and become influenced by what we see. We must take care the windows are not obstructed. We must not build another wall outside the window (this would be to let worldly things conceal what we know). We must not let the trees and shrubs grow too close to the glass (this would be to let business hide the light of God). We must not let the windows get covered with dust and cobwebs (this would be to let the natural sloth of human nature get the upper hand of us). We must keep the windows clean and all things at their proper place and distance. The breaking of bread is to help us to exercise this vigilance. It is not the only

means God has given us to this end, as we know, but it has a central place. It acts as the flywheel that keeps the rest of the machinery in motion. We have His written Word as the principal agent in keeping the memory true and bright. A little clause in our reading today brings this before us in a specially distinct though not immediately recognisable way. Perhaps you noticed in the chapter of Numbers the directions about a fringe of blue to be placed in the hems of their garments with a special association—(the origin of the phylacteries made so ostentatiously broad in the days of Jesus). The object of it is specially worthy of consideration:

“It shall be to you for a fringe that ye may look upon and ‘remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them;’ and that ye ‘seek not after your own heart and your own eyes’.”

Always remembering that the Law of Moses was a form and pattern of the righteousness with which God is pleased, it is interesting and profitable to follow up the analogies when we can. It seems so easy to do so in this case. Blueness is associated in the Scriptures with healthy healing wounds (Pro. 20:30). This is a beautiful suggestion considering we are wounded by sin, and that the memory of Yahweh’s commandments is the cure. The blue fringe was to be on the garments daily worn. This shows that the Bible idea of religion is very different from that which makes it an affair of Sunday or special occasions or a thing to be hidden away out of sight like a legal document kept in a safe. Bible godliness—the remembrance of God with obedience—is a thing for daily wear—a light to shine always—a fragrance never absent from the “walk and conversation”—Its object was to bring Yahweh’s commandments to memory—constant memory. It is according to the will of God that we be in the fear of God all the day long, and have Him in remembrance in all circumstances—honouring Him always before men, and not denying Him to propitiate ungodly friends, however refined. The remembrance of the commandments excited by the daily worn blue fringe was that they might “do them.” A knowledge that does not lead to action is useless. A man who prates about the commandments of God but does not perform them is an abomination to God and man. The blue fringe in effect tells us this. Finally, it delivers a lesson that may not be so readily discerned and that might not seem needed: “that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes.” How much there is in this, experience tells us. A man’s own heart and own eyes will certainly deceive him in the great questions of duty and final wellbeing. He will incline to ways that will destroy him: he will assume certain suppositions (from the appearance of things) that time will confute too late. The world at large is erring in this way, and by its very magnitude draws more into its vortex. The blue fringe was to tell them that man’s reading of life is too superficial to be true; that man’s view of the universe is too limited to afford safe guidance. Heaven and earth and the ages are too great for man to know of himself where he is and how to steer. Man requires to be told the truth by Him who knows it; and his only safety lies in implicitly doing as he is told. The advice is good which says,

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding.”

Thine own understanding is altogether too small a thing to lean to. Thine own heart and thine own eyes will tell thee lies. They will say that man only is, that God is not; that the present only is, that the past has never been; that the present only can be, that the future never will come; that thou hast never known a cradle, and wilt never fill a grave; that Moses is a myth; Alexander of Macedon an invention; Constantine a story; Charlemagne a French dream; Napoleon a nightmare fantasy; Gog of the land of Magog, the baseless and impossible conception of fanaticism. “Thine own heart and thine own eyes” left to their unenlightened operation, will tell thee that the affairs of thy bed and board are the only affairs that will ever concern thee; that thy parish is the great reality; that thy lifetime is the focus of all that was ever important upon the earth, or, ever can be. Refuse the foolish guidance of “thine own

heart and thine own eyes.” Take the larger heart and the more penetrating eyes that belong to the wisdom that has contrived the universe. Open thy mind to what He has to tell thee concerning what has been; what He is aiming at; what will be; and what relation there is between the present ongoings and the fruition of that purpose for thee. Look on the blue and remember the God of Israel and His wondrous dealings with them by Moses and the prophets, reaching even to thee through Christ, to whom all the prophets gave witness. Be not of the fools that cannot see Christ for Gladstone, that cannot see Moses for the British constitution; that cannot see the Bible for their own poor, evanescent, bubble-expanding, though endless pouring, press. These are like the children in the street area to whom the naphtha lamps are much bigger affairs than the moon. The things of God, like the orbs of heaven, are great and bright, but because they are, for the time being, distant, they are liable to be very completely eclipsed by the gewgaws of the Vanity Fair that is going on universally upon the earth. The liability to be deceived by *“thine own heart and thine eyes”* is so great that we require the blue fringe in the daily worn garment. *“The Scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation,”* and that only in their diligent reading and daily remembrance. Under their inspiration, the heart and eyes are kept in a correct relation to truth, and no longer mislead us by a false interpretation of things.

We may apply this line of reflection in a special manner to the central ordinance of our weekly assembly. We break bread in *‘remembrance.’* The bread and the wine are a special form of the blue fringe. They have to do with wounds that were healed and that have a healing power for the wounded.

“By his stripes we are healed.”

Body broken, blood shed, for us. As we look on them, we are to distrust *“our own heart and our own eyes”* as to what is acceptable with God. Our own heart and our own eyes would tell us, what many preachers proclaim, that kindly feeling and neighbourly ways and good house management and sound and honest business dealings are the things that constitute righteousness (God forbid they should be in the least underrated in their place). Our own heart and our own eyes would say that the breaking of bread was child’s play; that the death of Christ was pure barbarity; that his resurrection was a fable; and that all Bible ways and Bible things are so much antiquated trash, which it is the best and the most convenient thing for men of sense to discard. We look on the blue fringe before us, and we say to our own heart and our own eyes, “Cease your presumptuous gabble.” God has spoken and we will listen. He has commanded and we will obey. He has provided a mode or system of righteousness in Christ which we will joyfully submit to as the highest privilege and honour open to mortal man. We will not be like the Jews of Paul’s day, of whom he says,

“Being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:2).

Of God, Christ is made unto us righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30), and we will rejoice in it as his humble servants. We hear him say, *“This is my body given for you . . . Except ye eat of the flesh and drink of the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you.”* We believe it, and we eat and drink with thanksgiving—spiritually, in the discernment of what he accomplished in his submission to death; literally, in eating the bread and drinking the wine in remembrance of these things. We hear him say, *“Till I come.”* Our own heart and our own eyes would tell us . . . “He never will come.” To our ignorant hearts and undiscerning eyes we oppose the uncontradictable teachings of the fringe of blue. Whence came this institution of the breaking of bread? Let a man trace its history with the acumen that men ordinarily apply to matters of historic investigations, and he will find himself landed in the presence of the apostles, and through them, in the very presence of Christ himself. No other conclusion would he find admissible than this one, that owes its existence to the command of Christ. And when he

looks at this conclusion all round in a pondering manner, he will ask, how came Christ to deliver such a command? —with what object did he erect this memorial of his sufferings? —with what object, this memento of his intended return? And he will find no satisfactory answer to these questions, except the one that recognises that he was what he claimed to be—the Son of God sent into the world to be its Saviour. And when this is recognised, the door is put wide open for his coming again.

For if he was the Son of God, he certainly will perform all he has promised. His coming again cannot, in that case, be denied; it cannot be even doubted by purely logical and truly humble minds. Such, on the contrary, will gladly acknowledge and confess it as the best piece of tidings ever promulgated among men—that this same Jesus, whom the apostles saw depart from the summit of the Mount of Olives, will so come in like manner as they saw him go.

This is a conclusion of perfectly stupendous character. No language can exaggerate it; no imagination can go beyond it. Yet we are so accustomed to it as a doctrine that we rarely rise to the full and terrible import of the fact. Jesus makes our danger in this respect the subject of special exhortation.

“As a snare,” saith he, “shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.”

“Watch ye therefore and pray always.”

A snare is something unanticipated to the very moment of its action, and final and irretrievable when once it springs. Christ tells us that this will be the relation of his coming to the whole population of the world. Well may he say, *“Watch therefore.”* The indifference of the whole community to the subject and their absolute sense of security are liable to react upon us by an almost unconscious process, and to infect us with the same spirit.

“Blessed are those servants whom their Lord when he cometh shall find watching.”

To watch is to have the event always in calculation. Some, looking to the slow evolution of the signs of the times, are liable to say, “What is the use? The Jews are not in the land yet. Gog is not mustered yet.” This is not wise. May we not die, brethren, at any time? And what then? In one moment, we hurry over the unconscious blank of death, however prolonged, to find Christ here. Resurrection will reinstate us in the land of the living at the point where we broke off. Suppose therefore we fall asleep unwatchful? You see the application of Christ’s words;

“Be ye always ready.”

The readiness is a state of mental, moral and practical harmony with the event—desiring it, preparing for it. The dangers to be guarded against were as urgent 1,900 years ago as they will be the very month before Christ returns. They are urgent all the time, and Christ indicated that they are subject to our will and arrangement as to how far we escape them, or come under their power.

“Take heed to yourselves,” saith he, “lest at any time ‘your hearts’ be ‘overcharged’ with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life.”

“Surfeiting” is too much; “care” is too little; there is danger in both extremes. If we are in either, Jesus says, “take heed;” and this taking heed is a matter of keeping the mind in habitual contact with the lessons of wisdom in the reading of the Scriptures and attendance on that assembly of ourselves together which has been commanded. By-and-by, all need for heed-taking will be at an end. The joyful proclamation will go abroad:

“Behold the bridegroom cometh! Go ye out to meet him.”

Happy then will those be who are ready; unhappy, beyond the power of man to endure, those who have allowed their hearts to be overcharged with the transient affairs of this mortal state.

Taken from “Seasons of Comfort” Vol. 2 Pages 56-61