

## **UNPROMISING CHAPTERS CONTAIN BEAUTIFUL TRUTHS.**

### **Sunday Morning # 238**

Christ desires men who are candidates for his selection to give him a place in their love at least on a level with domestic friendships. Christ's own verdict on the man that gives him a lower place, is: "*not worthy of me.*" The man that is not worthy of him will not get him. There is a sense in which no man can be worthy of him. Yet all who enter the Kingdom of God will do so because they are "*counted worthy*" of so great an honour. The worthiness is worthiness as estimated by the great Judge and Assessor—the Lord Jesus. An element of it is this keeping of him in memory. This he values in any human being. How important, then, to keep him in memory; just in that degree is it important to do and observe those ways and practices that help us to keep him in memory. This he values in any human being. How important, then, to keep him in memory; just in that degree is it important to do and observe those ways and practices that help us to keep him in memory.

There are ways that help and there are ways that hinder. One of the ways that help is this meeting for the breaking of bread. We may think sometimes we can remember him without the breaking of bread. We shall make a mistake if we give in to this thought—a mistake on two heads: we shall be putting ourselves in the ranks of the disobedient; for this was "*delivered*" or handed over by Paul to the brethren as a commandment from the Lord, and he implores us to "*forsake not the assembly of ourselves together as the manner of some is.*" A mistake also in supposing that the Lord has erred or been guilty of superfluity in requiring this observance at the hands of his friends "*until he come.*" One of the ways that hinder is the staying away from the assembly for the breaking of bread. This soon leads to the suspension of reading: the suspension of reading leads to the loss of interest because of "*the lusts of other things entering in.*" This inclines the mind to listen readily to arguments against the Bible: and ultimately, there is the sad spectacle of a man shipwrecked in faith and drifting on life's ocean to become part of the flotsam and jetsam that storms wash up on the beach. We come together to meditate and to worship. The one enlightens and the other soothes and ennobles and enlarges the mind. Opening the mind to God gives it the largest action of which it is possible, but both require the word of truth to make their action truly beneficial. Mere meditation may be profitless reverie, and mere worship may be a pious adoring of "Ye know not what." It requires the word of truth to impart to these exercises a profitable solidity, just as the watering mouth and the craving stomach require food for the proper exercise of their function. The word of truth gives us substance for the spiritual stomach to act on and profit by. The Bible is a great granary in which are stores of great variety. We get the benefit of all by turns, by our habit of daily reading. It was a good day when brethren resolved upon introducing this practice into the first day meetings as well as in their private practice on week days. There is always something before us for profitable consideration, with the additional attraction of that variety which seems essential to mortal faculty.

Today it is a chapter from Numbers and a chapter from John. It might not seem at first sight as if there was any connection between the memorial breaking of bread and these portions of Scripture, or between the chapters themselves. When we are thoroughly acquainted with the whole Scriptures, we cease to have any feeling of this sort concerning any part of the word of truth. We come to see it as it is in fact—the literary embodiment of a

common purpose, a common word, a common truth pervaded by a common Spirit, and interconnected in all its details. Wherever we read, we are on a ladder that reaches up to a gallery, that goes round the whole circumference of the truth of God. Let us get up by the ladder of this morning's reading.

It is very unpromising as regards Numbers, but let us get our feet on the rungs. The chapter is all about the sacrifices the children of Israel were to offer in the land—first, on every day; then on the Sabbath; then on the first day of each month; then at the feast of the Passover; and then at the feast of first fruits. These things are all in abeyance at the present time, but they have not lost their power to teach. They are all parts of a law which was “*a shadow of good things to come*,” and which constituted in its entirety, “*the form of knowledge and of the truth*” as Paul informs us in Romans 2. Let us consider them in this bearing, and see how much they tell us remindingly of the precious things of Christ.

First of all, the lamb is present in all these ordinances: a lamb daily, two lambs on every Sabbath, seven lambs on the first day of the month, seven lambs at the feast of the Passover, and seven lambs at the feast of first fruits. Here is a feature that connects at once with the chapter in John, where Jesus is introduced as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world; and with the breaking of bread in which we were engaged. The breaking of bread was instituted at the eating of the Passover lamb; and concerning Jesus, who is memorialised in the breaking of bread at the time appointed, Paul says:

*“Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.”*

Also in the visions of the Apocalypse, Christ is introduced as “*a lamb slain*,” and his name in this respect is continued in the figure of the Bride as the Lamb's wife, and in his description as the Lamb against whom the world at last makes war, and whose wrath (wrath of the Lamb) is a destructive agent in the breaking-up of the present evil world. Consequently, it is no imagination or gratuitous exegesis that sees Christ in the Lamb so frequently mentioned in Numbers 28.

How pleasing is such a figuration of Christ—a lamb—the most gentle and inoffensive of animals—suggestive of nothing but peace and safety. What a contrast to a dragon—the symbol of the sin-power of the world. So great is the contrast between the things symbolised. Human government is unfeeling, rough, unscrupulous, destructive. Nothing is more dreadful than to get into the clutches of the law. Even the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. But of Jesus, we read that he is a good shepherd, who will gather the lambs in his arms. He testified of himself as a reason why his invitation should be accepted,

*“I am meek and lowly of heart;”*

*“I am among you as one that serveth.”*

And Paul speaks of “*the meekness and gentleness of Christ*.” How consoling in the midst of life's rough ways to think of Christ in this character. Every true heart has the comfort of thinking that, however roughly man may use them, there is a tender and loving man at God's right hand who is terrible only to his enemies; who, to those that love and obey him, will be a merciful and faithful high priest now, and a kindly and encouraging dispenser of the bread of life eternal at the appointed time.

Consider also this side of the subject:

*“He hath left us an example that we should follow in his steps.”*

God hath ordained that all his family should be conformed to the image of His son.

*“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”*

This is an aspect of the matter requiring the most careful and constant consideration. Most people like the idea of Christ being kind and merciful, but have no idea that it is necessary that they should be also so. Most people are soothed by the love of Christ when they give any attention to it; they think it very pious and highly meritorious when they are exercised in this way.

They have not realised, under the teaching of the clergy, that they must themselves be lovers and well-doers to all with whom they are thrown in contact. They have forgotten that it was written that: —

*“He shall have judgment without mercy that showeth no mercy.”*

Be it ours to be-not like most people, but-like the people in whom Christ will find pleasure in the day of his coming-men who not only know God with the understanding, but love him with the whole heart and who act the part of God in being like Christ in the dealings and doings and beings and saying of our limited sphere. This we are commanded. Jesus himself commands:

*“Be like unto your Father.”*

Paul exhorts,

*“Be ye followers of me as I also am of Christ.”*

As brethren, we have no choice but subject ourselves to these commandments. In doing so, we necessarily put ourselves out of accord with the world in which we live. It is true now as when Jesus said it in prayer (John 17):

*“The world hath not known thee.”*

Are we to harmonise with a world that knows not God and obeys not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? There is a constant danger of our doing so, because we live and move in such a world. We must be up in arms against this danger. We must keep close to the company of Christ in the written word, and then, in a sense, we shall be under no temptation to betray him in acting the part of an enemy of his by being a friend of the world and all its ways.

Then there was the killing of the lamb which was required in all the ordinances recorded in Numbers 28. This was the essence of the institution, that the animal should be slain and offered. But this is not the most remarkable fact in the case. The sacrifice was to be offered as *“a sweet savour”* unto God. It is so stated in the chapter read (verse 2), and in many other parts of the Law of Moses. For a thing to be a sweet savour is to be a thing agreeable-a thing giving pleasure. Here is the fact inviting our reverential meditation-that the

sacrifice was a thing giving pleasure to God-whether in type or antitype, for the same thing is stated in connection with the sacrifice of Christ:

*“He hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.”* (Eph. 5:2).

It is not possible to understand how the death of Christ should be a satisfaction to God unless we have before our minds the principles and results involved. We can, of course, understand how the death of Christ should give this satisfaction as a crowning act of obedience; but this is only one phase of it. God commanded him to lay down his life, and he was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, but God would not have required the death of His beloved son, in whom He was well pleased, unless there had been a necessity for it. It was not necessary to prove his obedience, for this had been abundantly put to the test during a whole life without sin.

There was a deeper reason: and in the contemplation of this deeper reason, we may understand how the death of Christ was *“a sweet-smelling savour”* to the Eternal Father. This deeper reason is hinted at by Paul in the statements that, God thus *“condemned sin in the flesh,”* (Rom. 8:3) and set forth Christ crucified as a declaration of his righteousness (3:25) in the destruction of the devil having the power of death (Heb. 2:14) that *“the body of sin might be destroyed.”* (Rom. 6:6,10). When we apprehend the principle that underlies these phrases, we may understand how the tragedy which they describe should be to God *“an odour of a sweet smell.”* The principle involved is the supremacy of God and the absolute ascendancy of His will in the ways of man. This principle was set aside in the transgression of our first parents, and has been set aside ever since in the life of their posterity-in consequence of which, death reigns. If God is angry with the wicked (Psalm 7: 11), and grieved at the foolish ways of man (Genesis 6: 6), we may understand how a transaction that meant the assertion of His right to be obeyed as the indispensable condition of friendship with man should be a satisfaction to Him. That this was the meaning of the death of Christ, the Bible declares. How it could have such a meaning we see when we recognise that the body nailed on the cross was the identical nature of the death-inheriting human race. There were millions of such bodies in the earth at the time, but none of them would have sufficed, because, though the crucifixion of any of them would have proclaimed the same principles, no healing could have come with it. The man crucified would not have become the man raised. The law that killed him must have held him, for *“the wages of sin is death.”* It needed one who was not a sinner, yet possessing the sinful nature of the condemned race of Adam, so that resurrection and life eternal might follow the condemnation of sin in the flesh.

The offering of such a one was a sweet smelling savour which the offering of a sinner could not have been; sweet on all sides of it; sweet, as the triumphant compliance of a beloved son under the severest test; sweet, as the illustration to all the world of the inexorable supremacy of the divine will as the law of human well-being; sweet, as the vindication of His authority, and at the same time, as the manifestation of His kindness; and sweet as affording the occasion for the delightful rebound of His grace in the rescue of Christ from his persecutors, and the preaching of him to all the world as: —

*“The only name given under Heaven whereby we must be saved.”*

It was a sweet savour in ways that are too subtle for expression. God has said,

*“I will be sanctified in them that approach unto me.”*

*“I will be exalted in the earth.”*

*“I am God; my glory I will not give to another.”*

*“To me every knee shall bow and every tongue confess.”*

The proclamation of the holiness of God and the authority of God and the righteousness of God, made to all the world, in the public crucifixion of human nature in the person of His own beloved son, must have been a gratification to the divine nature, in view of the objects aimed at—the reconciliation of the world at last in harmony with Himself on the basis of the assertion of His absolute prerogative, recognised and endorsed by every believing man and woman, with the result of their own forgiveness and admission to life eternal. It is only when we look at the cross with merely mortal affections that we have any difficulty in understanding it as the expression of divine supremacy. Looking at it in the light of divine thoughts, we are able to understand why *“it pleased the Lord to bruise him,”* and how it comes to pass that *“with his stripes we are healed.”* God is pleased at the assertion of His prerogative, and can beam forth in the effulgence of His kindness. Without the slain lamb, this could not have been. The sacrifice was for a sweet-smelling savour.

But there was something in the type besides the slaying and offering of the lamb. There were accessory elements in the offering. There was to be offered along with the lamb, a meat-offering of flour, an anointing with pure oil, and a drink-offering of strong wine. There is a cheering significance about these further types. They tell us of something besides death. Death by itself is never the object of sacrifice. Sacrifice is to open the way for life and joy. So here we have flour, mingled with oil. Flour, giving bread, is the staff of life. Its presence in the sacrifices tells us of him, who was not only the sacrificial lamb, but who said he was: —

*“The bread of God which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world.”*

The mingling of oil in the flour of the meat-offering intimates the participation of the Spirit in the work. We learn this from the periphrastic use of these terms. Thus, we are not only told that *“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 10:38), but *“that he anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the oil of gladness above his fellows.”* (Heb. 1:9). It is the Spirit-element in the work of Christ that ensures its life-giving power, as Jesus said,

*“The flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.”*

Life by the Spirit of God is the indication of the presence of flour and oil in the sacrifice. But what about the strong wine of the drink-offering that had to accompany the sacrifice? This is nothing but joy and gladness. Wine is spoken of in Scriptures as that which *“maketh glad the heart of man.”* We read of *“corn that shall make the young men cheerful and new wine the maids.”*

What a delightful combination. There are things too beautiful to be described—the grace of a statue, the colours of the prism. This is one of them. The bloodshed of sacrifice by itself would mean sorrow and death. There is a place for sorrow and death, but not for their own sakes. They are temporary necessities where the will of God has been set aside. It is that the foundation of light, and life, and joy, and gladness, may be laid for the creatures He has

made. Therefore joy-causing wine is among the shadows that enter into the constitution of sacrifice as a “*sweet-smelling savour*.” There is a very direct connection between the two statements:

*“I will be exalted in the earth.”*

*“Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”*

The two things unite in the sacrifice which we celebrate in this breaking of bread. God was exalted in the death of His son, in whom “*sin was condemned*” and “*righteousness declared*.” We join in that exaltation in being baptised into that death, and in carrying about with us, like Paul, in this evil state “*the dying of the Lord Jesus*,” and we receive the sweet results of that exaltation in the forgiveness of our sins, and the assurance of divine favour. But we can never in this corruptible state realise the fullness of the privilege that has come to us in the acceptance of the offers of the righteousness of God. We walk by faith only at present. Faith is a great power; but what comparison has it to sight? We cannot know the glories of sight till we experience them. Faith is the road that leads to them. It is a narrow road and a dark and toilsome one, but enlightened understanding can assent to this with resignation. It is the arrangement of wisdom. It is not fitting that a sinful state should be a perfect state. It is a good and a necessary preparation for eternal glory, that we should have to go through “*the sufferings of this present time*.” Therefore it is expedient that we listen to the exhortation which says to us,

*“Lift up the hands that hang down and strengthen the feeble knees.”*

There is no need for hopeless dejection if we can only see with a clear eye the facts as they are. We are here in an evil state. We cannot mend it by despair. We have heard of a great mending in hand: a great work started for the regeneration of the world. And we have been invited to take hold of this work. What better thing can we do than cheerfully throw sloth and sadness to the wind and go forward and take God at His word. His glorious work will be done whether we take part or not: we had better be in it. Our power may be small in the matter, but little depends on us. Something depends upon us, but not much—about as much as depends upon a farmer for his crops who has good land in a good climate. The sun will shine and the rain will fall and vegetation will bud whether he stir a foot or no. His part is the small one of ploughing, and sowing and harrowing and reaping. Let him do this, and he will have his share of the harvest, though the garnered grain will be none of his making.

We have been told in this higher matter that we shall reap as we sow. Let us be up and doing. We have but to obey orders. “*Learn of me*:” have we not done so in the study of the Gospel? “*Believe*:” do we not? “*Be baptised!*” Have we not submitted? “*Keep my commandments*:” are we not engaged in this endeavour?

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