

BEHIND JESUS CRUCIFIED ARE GOD'S CLAIMS

We meet here this morning on a foundation that cannot be taken away. It is a great thing to have a foundation in an age like this, when men are building on all kinds of floating and flimsy structures which are certain to drift on Time's ceaseless stream away into the ocean of oblivion. Many are building on the mortal life of present experience, with no care or pretence for anything beyond. We know where that will lead: they die and are forgotten. Others build on human philosophy of a future state. That must end in the same way if the philosophy should happen to ignore Jesus Christ, which almost all philosophy does. Others accept the dreams of an Emmanuel Swedenborg, the hallucinations of a Madame Blavatsky, the speculations of a Herbert Spencer, the optimistic agnosticisms of a Tennyson, the scientific guesses of a Darwin, the cosmic vagaries of a La Place, or, failing all else, the traditions of hereditary piety or the dogmatism of Papal pretensions.

Wherein do we differ from all these? We build on the foundation of Moses and the prophets. To this foundation we adhere with all the indomitable tenacity that is born of reason. It is not the choice of taste or the bias of sentiment that leads us to prefer the Scriptures above every form or phase of human thought. We are compelled by the force of truth, generated by facts, discerned as all facts are discerned over the world-wide, and through all the ages of which we have record. Let us take the small illustration before us. Here we have in our hands a letter written by the apostle Paul, as every canon of criticism and reasonable principles of evidence compels us to recognise. In this letter Paul urges Timothy, the young man to whom he was writing, to "*continue in the things which he had learned and had been assured of.*" Why? He answers:

"Knowing of whom thou hast learnt them."

Who were those of whom he had learnt them? The apostles:

"Of me among many witnesses."

How was that a reason for holding on to the things learnt? Because the things so learnt were not matters of opinion or report, but matters of fact and knowledge at first hand.

"We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but were eye-witnesses of his majesty!"

"Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?"

"Last of all, he was seen of me also."

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

Well, that was a good reason why Timothy should continue in the things he had learnt; but Paul adds another reason:

"And (knowing) that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures."

How was this a reason for holding fast?

"Which are able to make thee wise unto salvation."

Why have they this character? Why are they able to do this great thing?

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for reproof, instruction, etc."

Here we stop to consider what is meant by inspiration of God, not as to how it acts, but as to what it is when it acts. We do not need to consider long when we realise that the mind of man is one thing, and the mind of God quite another. As God himself says,

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways."

Inspiration of God is therefore a putting into a man's mind what is not there of man's own power or gift, as defined in the express words of Peter.

“Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

It must have been so, for how otherwise could man know the things of God? Paul states a self-evident truth when he says: *“The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God,”* and these things man could not be trusted to define. The Spirit of God had to find the words as well, as Paul adds *“which things we speak not in words that man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth.”* Hence it is that the extraordinary phenomenon is presented to us by Peter of inspired men not understanding the words written by themselves under Spirit impulse:

“The prophets searched and enquired diligently . . . searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.”

It was the Spirit that **“testified beforehand.”** How could the prophets *“testify beforehand,”* as natural men? Prophecy is no gift of human nature.

This view, so clearly enunciated by Peter and Paul, is constantly sanctioned by Christ, as we should expect in view of his saying concerning the apostles:

“He that heareth you heareth me.”

He told the Pharisees to “search the Scriptures.” Why?

“They are they that testify of me.”

If the Scriptures of Moses and the prophets testify of Christ, they must have been given by inspiration of God, for how could men not inspired of God testify of events to happen hundreds of years after their own time? Again Jesus said—

“Moses wrote of me.”

The same question arises: how could Moses have done this if he had not been inspired? Moses, like the rest of men, knew nothing of futurity by human power. Again Jesus said to those who imagined he had come to make an entirely new start and to override Moses and the prophets:

“Think not that I am come to destroy Moses and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”

How could Jesus have spoken of “fulfilling” Moses and the prophets if they had not been the inspired Word of God? Again he plainly says,

“The Scriptures cannot be broken,” and again,
The Scriptures must be fulfilled.”

The conversation after his resurrection with his disciples on the road to Emmaus affords perhaps the most interesting of all illustrations of the estimate in which Jesus held the scriptures of the Old Testament. He found fault with them for not believing *“all that the prophets had spoken.”*

“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

Having afterwards made himself known to the eleven, and referred to the circumstances of his death, he said:

“These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms concerning me.”

In standing, then, upon the Scriptures, we stand upon that which is authenticated to us by Christ and the apostles as the Word of God, and are able to enter into the idea expressed by Paul in his parting words at Miletus:

“I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.”

Now, are we not safe in building on such a foundation? How can we be safe in building on any other? If God have spoken by Moses and the prophets and by His Son, then, in listening to any other, we are rejecting God and turning to man, unless those to whom we turn speak in harmony with the Scriptures. That is another thing. Peter says:

*“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;” and God says—
“If any man speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in him.”*

The world around us is all astray on both points. They do not speak as the oracles of God, and worse, they freely indulge in thoughts and speeches that are in direct opposition to the law and testimony. We must be on our guard against being drawn into their folly. It is for us to hold fast to what is taught in the Scriptures, however strongly the current of human thought may run against it.

Now, Paul says,

“I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Here is one of those things in which the thoughts of man and the thoughts of God are at variance. *“To the Jews a stumbling block: to the Greeks foolishness;”* to all men an unattractive conception. Who finds pleasure in the thoughts that centre in *“Jesus Christ and him crucified”*? Look around among friends and neighbours, are they not repelled, one and all, amiable and cultured as they may be, by this subject which Paul said was the only subject he would know among the Corinthians? The news of the day, music, art, science, books, men’s doings, —these are all in good relish; but Jesus Christ and him crucified? Well, it is to them monomaniacal rubbish. How is this? Do they say there was no Jesus Christ or that he was not crucified? Not they. There would be some consistency in their aversion if this were the position they took. They have simply no taste for the subject: they are not at home in it. Worse, it is nauseous to them. How is this? Paul gives us the reason in a certain form when he says:

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.”

This is true in its extreme form among the absolutely unenlightened; but it is true in degree all through the different shades that divide darkness from light. We are all barbarians at the bottom; and in proportion as we are under the power of natural bias (which is the bias of ignorance and mere instinct) we disrelish the things of the Spirit of God. This disrelish is no part of true enlightenment. It gives way entirely before the appreciation created by the knowledge of God. *“Jesus Christ, and him crucified,”* instead of being a barren formula or a repellent theme becomes the symbol of light and hope and the foundation of comfort and joy.

Jesus Christ is Jesus Anointed, Jesus Messiah, Jesus King, Jesus the coming head and shepherd of the human race, whose revelation will bring the supply of all the political and social and individual conditions that are requisite to transform the earth from a scene of dull and dreary misery into an active, joyful, beautiful world of light and joy for all. This is the Gospel of the Kingdom, the constant contemplation of enlightened hope; rooted and founded in God’s own purpose and promise—apart from which, there is nothing in prospect but endless vanity and darkness.

But Paul’s theme—Paul’s standing subject among the Corinthians, was not only Jesus Christ but *“him crucified.”* This is another phase. This has to do with the insides of things. This touches those aspects of the truth that are totally uncongenial to the natural mind, but full of delight to those in whom the natural mind has been revolutionised by the knowledge revealed by the Spirit of God. Many can think of the Kingdom with pleasure that have no heart for the things involved in the cross. The Kingdom, as the most ravishing poetical idyll

ever exhibited to human thought, naturally appeals to the human love of beauty and rest and well-being, irrespective of its co-relations. Mere poets and idealists are not saints. Sentimentality is not godliness. The Kingdom is but a flower whose root is God and is only for those who take the root with the plant.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart."

Jesus calls this *"the first and the great commandment."* There must be compliance here before there can be possession of the delights and glory of the Kingdom.

What has the cross to do with this? We see when we ask—why was Christ crucified? Some say, because the Jews hated him. This is only part of the answer. This is the human side of the event. There is a divine side. This is exhibited in Acts 4:27:

"Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined to be done."

The crucifixion of Jesus was divinely pre-ordained, with what object?

"By him, to reconcile all things to himself . . . in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:20, 23).

But what had the crucifixion of his body to death to do with this result? There are several apostolic definitions that explain this. Putting these three together, we get the answer—

"Condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3) *"to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God"* (3:25); *"that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin"* (6:6).

God required that our sinful and condemned nature should be federally put to death in one who had done no sin, through whom, after resurrection, we could come, in baptismal identification with his death, for forgiveness and friendship with God, *"if we continue in the faith grounded and settled."* It was our very nature that was put to death in him. It was righteously so done because of his physical participation in the results of Edenic transgression. His resurrection was in righteousness also; for *"he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."* Forgiveness on this basis is by grace (favour) and not of debt; for the death of Christ is not the payment of our debt but the declaration of God's righteousness, on our recognition and submission to which, He is pleased to pass by our sins, of His own kindness and forbearance.

It is evident, then, that behind Christ crucified, is God and His claims on us. He claims our love; He claims our obedience. Both are the claims of the highest reason, for when reason opens to the origin of all things in God, we feel the utmost rousing of admiration at the perfect wisdom and goodness which they show to exist innately in Him. And when we realise that *"It is He that made us, and not we ourselves,"* and that we are merely so much of His stuff in a certain form by His permission, the idea of disobedience seems madness. To *"delight in the law of God after the inward man"* becomes the elementary act of reason. Any other state is aberration, due to ignorance. Its visitation by death is both reasonable and beautiful, for how could we imagine rebellion tolerated in a permanent state of things? And how could we imagine the misery of sin to be allowed to be endless?

The death of Christ is the assertion of all these beautiful truths, and the laying of the foundation-stone of salvation in righteousness. But it has a powerful and urgent application now to all those who are baptised into his death and in the enjoyment of the forgiveness predicated upon that submission. Paul supposes the question:

"Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"

His answer is energetic.

“God forbid. How shall we that have died to sin (in taking part baptismally in the very death that Christ died) live any longer therein?” “Our old man (our old nature) was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

So that there was a dramatic lesson in it. Every time we look at Christ crucified, we see a reason why we should not be guided by the mere instincts of the body we now possess, for that body was put to death on the cross that we might be told that rational life is not to be found by obeying the impulses that are native to that body. Those impulses are the law of life in the world, they are not the law of the sons of God. They are not a safe law. Followed by themselves, they lead to every hideousness and ruin. Regulated by law (that is, by God’s commands), they are beautiful, as fire is, under control. But the world loves not the law. Naturally, we revolt at it.

“The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

But when the power of the Spirit enters our minds, by the Word of the Spirit understood and believed, the darkness of the carnal mind gives way before the light, and we *“put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.”*

The restraints and self-denials and disciplines implied in this process may be irksome to flesh and blood; but there is another side. Even in systems of human wisdom, the value of “training” (whether physical or mental) is recognised; but what training can compare in results to that which hews us into the divine image while yet in the flesh; confers peace in a world of unrest and trouble; gilds the future with the glory of infinite hope; and at last confers the priceless gift of an incorruptible nature in which God will be our open vision and His whole universe our sphere of joyful life for ever?

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