

## SUNDAY MORNING NO. 286.

Much of the comfort of our life depends upon our having right views of matters in general. It is a common thing to entertain a wrong view, and it is very easy and very natural to catch up the wrong view. The wrong view we may call the Eliphaz view, that is, the view contended for by Eliphaz in controversy with Job; a view to the effect that in the present state of life, things are on the whole carried on correctly according to strict principles of righteousness, and that every man receives now according to his works; that darkness and trouble are for the wicked, and light and prosperity for the righteous. The holding of such a view is a misfortune, because it is not true: it is a view that will be shaken out of us by rough experience, and this mode of getting rid of the wrong view is liable to endanger the right one.

The Scriptures in various ways supply us with the materials for forming a right view. We may find them in unexpected places. Here is one this morning in our reading from Mark: a bleeding head in a silver charger, brought into the presence of lewd revellers. Whose head was it? The head of one whom Jesus said,

*“There hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist;”*

a messenger sent before the Lord, to prepare his way. This being so, should we ever have expected such a finish to his course? Then look at another head—not in a silver charger, but dealt with much more roughly than that; a head hewn ruthlessly from the shoulders of its owner by the axe of a barbarian, and thrown to the beasts. Whose head was that? His of whom the Lord said to Ananias,

*“Go thy way, he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before kings.”*

And the Lord had said,

*“All power is given unto me in heaven and earth.”*

Should we have expected such a thing from the chosen vessel of Him who had all power in heaven and earth?

Then we look at still another picture. The form of a beloved one, of whom it was testified that he went about doing good, and of whom a voice from heaven proclaimed,

*“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

See that beloved form nailed naked to a rough piece of carpentry, in the open air, and in the presence of a jeering crowd; his head fallen upon his breast, his form contorted in unutterable agony, his heart breaking: left to die. Should we have expected such a finish as that to one who was holy and harmless and undefiled, separate from sinners?

We need to look at such cases to rightly judge the evil that may befall ourselves. There is a tendency to rebel against this evil, and to feel a sense of injustice in being subjected to it. We may be liable to feel as if it were inconsistent with the idea of God having any regard for anyone; but looking at matters rightly, we get the right view, and with the right view we shall fail to be surprised at anything. Right views enable us to understand all the confusion and cloud that now prevail upon the earth. The explanation of it is soon told, though it makes no impression on those minds that take what may be called a newspaper view of life. The explanation is this; that God, everlasting, great, and holy, is proprietor of the earth and man, and intends to reign for ever, and to have the homage of all, which is His due; but at present He has next to no homage at all; sin reigns, and therefore cloud, darkness, and tragedy. They are of His infliction, by apparently perfectly natural means, but they are not vindictive. They are not punitive, yet not wholly so; they are instrumental for the good ends that God has in purpose. He is using the day of sorrow and death to prepare a day of glory. Darkness is a preparation for light, as it is written,

*“He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him.”*

Recognising this, we can resign ourselves to all the evil, glad that God reigns, and directs all things after the counsel of His own will, using the frowns of justice as a means of leading the world to the smiles of reconciled munificence. If we do not recognise these things, we become weary, and rebel against experience; but recognising them, we can go through anything—not without feeling it. I do not say we become insensible to the evil by right views—far from it; we shall none the less keenly as a matter of present sensation; we shall often groan at the terribleness of the night, but we shall be able to bear it while waiting for God.

There will be an element, too, in this attitude, that only tribulation can produce; that element of self-renunciation which is the most foreign to all the natural thoughts of man, and the most characteristic of the children of God. It is the feeling expressed by David when he said:

*"I am in the Lord's hand; if he say, I have no delight in thee, here I am; let him do with me as seemeth good in his sight."*

Such self-effacement may seem too much for flesh and blood; well, it is not easily learnt, perhaps; it never can be learnt in the luxury of prosperity; it does come at last, with the affliction that belongs to the tribulation through which it has pleased God we must enter the kingdom. It is a bitter experience, it has to be very bitter to accomplish this result; but we may take the comfort that it is only for a few years we have to bear it; it never can last more than 70 years, which is nothing on the great scale of things. We can think of it like Paul, as

*"Our light affliction which is but for a moment."*

*"The night is far spent"*: in a little longer time the morning will be here, to usher in a day of glory that will never end.

There are other things that enter into the composition of a right view, one of which is introduced to our notice in the question that occurs in our reading from Mark. We are told that many hearing of Christ were astonished, saying:

*"From whence hath this man these things, and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?"*

Here is a question which goes to the root of the matter: let us get the answer to it, and we are on the rock. Whence, indeed, had Christ received his wisdom and his power? Who so likely to know as Christ himself? He has given us his account of it. He said:

*"Of mine own self I can do nothing."* How then? *"My Father, who dwelleth in me, He doeth the works."*

We look at the works, and we see this answer must be true. Who but God could raise the dead, walk the sea, and cure multitudes with a word? Who but God could raise Christ himself? Now, if God was the source of Christ's wisdom and power, then, in the presence of Christ, we are in the presence of God. This is what he said, that *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."* But it may be said all things are out of God. All things are truly the work of God, but there is a difference between different classes of His work. There is a difference between His direct work and the established automatic operations He has set going on every hand. The raising of a dead man is a different thing from the growing of crops, or the rising of the tide, or the blowing of the wind. The works of Christ were as Christ said, works that no other man did. They were works done for a specific purpose, affecting our lives and hopes. Peter says they were performed to mark God's approval of Christ as His Son,

*"A man approved among you by wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you."*

Other apostles tell us they were granted to confirm the word with signs following, to show that the word was a true word, a word from God; which can only be shown by works that only God can do. The object of the word is declared to be reconciliation;

*"God hath committed to us the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."*

The great thing aimed at was to show that God was willing to forgive, and to receive men into eternal life. If God had not proposed forgiveness as the basis of salvation, no flesh could have been saved, for, as it is testified,

*"There liveth not a man that sinneth not."*

This same question comes before us in another way, and leads us to rightness of view by another channel. One of the names of Christ is "The Word of God," and here we have in the Bible a book which is called the word of God; a wonderful book it is in every way, and the question is constantly recurring, whence hath this book the peculiarities which distinguish it from all other books? It has been with us a long time, and has exercised a powerful influence, and with all intelligent people it is one of the urgent questions of life, what manner of book is this? It is a book that differs from all other books, it is the "problem of authorship," as one of the German mystics calls it. It is an unclassifiable book, a book that does not belong to human literature; a book that Carlyle, that omnivorous devourer of all ordinary literature, had to let alone. Though he ransacked the books of all nations for the material for biographical writing, he dare not touch the Bible. He said he could not:

why? That raises the pointed and deep-reaching question asked about Christ. It is a question that requires attention to itself, in order to get the answer with all the force that belongs to it. People require to read it, as I suppose the brethren and sisters only do read it, in our day. I have not yet met a class of people that read the Bible every day on a system that takes the reader through the whole of it in one year, and the New Testament twice. It would be a refreshing thing to meet with such. By this method, we become acquainted with it in all its parts, and are therefore in a position to put and obtain an answer to this question. We have before us an immense field for judgment. The book is of the most varied character, and presents a great variety of non-human characteristics.

To begin with, it tells us what no man can narrate, for what man was alive when heaven and earth were made? And to finish with, it informs us of what no man can know,

*"I create new heavens and a new earth, and there shall be no more curse, no more pain, no more death."*

Between these two extraordinary passages at the beginning and end of the Bible, we have an extraordinary diversity of other and similar materials, which in their combined force leave no doubt as to the source from whence this book has come. By no possibility can it have had a human source when all things are considered. The complexion of its history is strong in this sense. Look at the episode of the spies, when Israel had come out of Egypt, and were encamped on the southern frontiers of Canaan. These spies came back and reported well of the land but unfavourably of the difficulties. They were so strongly impressed with the latter, that they proposed to stone Moses, and appoint another captain and lead the people back into Egypt. The congregation agreed with their view, and would have carried it out if God had not interposed. There was a democratic vote with a vengeance; the vote of a whole nation against what God had commanded, and may illustrate to us of how little value is "the voice of the people" in any matter bearing upon the will of God. The people had complained that Moses had brought them into the wilderness to kill them; God now said to them it should be as they complained;

*"Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. Go back every one of you, you will die, and until you are all dead, I will not fulfil my promise. I will fulfil it to your children."*

How could such a passage come to be written in a humanly written history? It is only intelligible on the hypothesis of its truth.

Then look at Moses himself; where did he die? In bed? Oh, no; on top of a mountain? The Bible tells why. If it had said he was taken up to a mountain to die because he was a great and holy man, we should have had a record perfectly consistent with human authorship, but no; the reason is,

*"Because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah,"* in smiting the rock instead of speaking to it, and in taking the credit for the miracle.

How could such a thing come to be written in the national record except it were true? especially with the details that accompany it. We are told that it vexed Moses exceedingly, and at the last, when the campaign against the Amorites was victoriously opened on the western side of the Jordan, Moses earnestly besought the Lord to allow him to *"go over and see the land beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain and Lebanon;"* but, says Moses, *"The Lord was wroth with me for your sakes and would not hear me. And the Lord said, Let it suffice thee; speak no more to me of this matter"* (Deut. 3:26).

These are only two randomly selected typical instances of the character of Bible history. In hundreds and hundreds of cases the prevailing characteristic is the same condemnation of the people. There is no flattery, no deferences, no attempts at conciliation, such as are customary on the part of popular leaders in all lands and in every age, in their handlings of the people. All this is quite intelligible if God spoke to them through their prophets and leaders; otherwise, it is a feature that cannot be accounted for; for it belongs no more to the Jews as a race than to the Gentiles, to go against the human love of praise.

The incident before us from Jeremiah is full of similar interest from another point of view, and would reward a closer attention than it is in our power to bestow upon it this morning. The Babylonians were conducting a siege against Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah was in the city, but in prison, because he had excited the displeasure of the leading men by foretelling the destruction of the city for their disobedience. He tells us that while there, the word of the Lord came to him, directing him to buy a certain field in his native village, about 12 or 20 miles distant, from a certain relative who should come to him. By-and-bye, the very man comes, *"Hanameel, mine uncle's*

son,” “Buy thee my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth.” Answers Jeremiah, “I knew that it was the word of the Lord;” and he proceeds to do as he had been directed. He conducts and finishes the transaction according to the legal process of the age, but he is in a quandary as to the meaning of it. What could be the object of going through this performance of peace, in the midst of war? He submitted the matter to the Lord, and the answer that came is an answer that we can apply in a certain way to our own circumstances.

*“Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land. Behold, I will gather Israel out of all countries whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in my great wrath, and I will bring them again to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them.”*

The argument of the transaction was, **do not judge by appearances where God’s word is involved.** Unutterable calamity was hanging over Israel’s head, and the circumstances of the moment were such as to make the future all dark. But here was a break of hope in the sky for Jeremiah; in fact, he was permitted a vision of the kingdom of God at a time when nothing seemed more unlikely ever to come.

It is not difficult to see the application to ourselves. We live in a time as evil as possible, when nothing seems so unlikely as that God should build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and bring down the great and towering despotisms of Russia, Germany, and other Gentile governments, and bring all mankind into subjection to His Son. But God has promised these things; it is for us to listen with due deference to God’s own question, which several times He propounded in the course of His dealings with His servants:

*“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”*

The answer of reason is, “Nothing.” Has He promised the kingdom? This is the question. He cannot be unfaithful, He will fulfil His promise, however formidable the difficulties may appear from a human point of view. Let us hold on to this confidence, brethren and sisters. We have been permitted the great honour of becoming acquainted with the word of God in this dark age. Let nothing come between us and its pure and glorious light. Though the vision may seem to tarry, wait for it,

*“For the vision is yet for an appointed time, at the end it shall speak and not lie. Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come.”*

Let us hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Taken from “The Christadelphian” of 1897  
Sunday Morning Pages 266-269  
By Bro Robert Roberts