

THE MAJESTY AND GRACE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

It is remarkable in how many places in the Scriptures we find the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God. It cannot be considered surprising, in view of the all-prevalent authorship of the Spirit of God throughout these writings. That One Spirit, operating "*at sundry times and divers manners*," should enunciate with frequency the one great purpose underlying all its communications—the purpose of finally bringing everything upon earth under one head, to the glory of the Eternal Creator, must, in a sense, seem natural.

The illustration this morning is the 45th Psalm, in which David appears before us full of matter on this subject.

"My heart is inditing a good matter . . . My tongue is the pen of a ready writer."

This suggests the idea of lively contemplation and stirring impulse to utter. The origin and nature of this mental fulness and activity we may easily understand in view of the testimony that "*the Spirit of God came upon David from that day* (the day of his anointing by Samuel) *and forward*;" and David's dying declaration:

"The Spirit of Yahweh spake by me, and His word was on my tongue."

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"—liberty of thought—liberty of utterance. David's natural ardour divinely supplemented thus, naturally made him a powerful singer of the divine verities.

The theme in this case he tells is "*touching the King*." This was the theme of his last words:

"He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun ariseth, even a morning without clouds" (2 Sam. 23:4).

What king was this? Was it himself, or any contemporary? Nay. This he excludes:

*"My house is **not so** with God."*

How did the topic come in then? He tells us:

*"He hath **made with me an everlasting covenant**, which is all my salvation and all my desire."*

To whom the covenant related is authoritatively settled for us in the apostolic testimony several times over: Peter tells us the covenant-undertaking was that God should raise up Christ to sit on David's throne. Consequently, we are not speculating. Our feet are on the rock of incontrovertible truth. In Psalm 45 we have before us a divine oracle on the glory of Christ. He is the "*King*" whose charms inspire the meditations of the writer, and give wing to the utterances of his tongue. In him we have the kernel of the Kingdom of God. A kingdom is a king's power territorially applied. It is the King that makes the Kingdom of God what it will be—a house of righteousness and a haven of rest.

We need a King. The democratic idea is not true to nature. The universe has a head. Nothing works well without a head.

"The head of every man is Christ."

We have Kings and heads, but none of them are fit for their office. They are mere makeshift appliances by which God regulates the present evil, till the moment arrives for His purpose to—

"Gather together all things under one head, even Christ."

We require a head who towers far above us in every respect—in love, and wisdom, and power, and life. God has provided for us such a head. The mass of mankind are indifferent to Him, or worse; they say with disobedient Israel,

"We will not have this man to reign over us."

Our meeting this morning has to do with Him. We are not of Israel's alienated mind. The love of Christ constraineth us.

The psalm is in His praise, and suits the mood which the table of remembrance inspires.

"Thou art fairer than the children of men."

In what sense? Fairness of countenance? Beauty of person? Christ will be all we could wish on these points, but this is not what is meant, as the next sentence shows.

"Grace is poured into thy lips."

Grace of lip or language is the principal part of grace as affirmable of a man. A man may be graceful from the artistic point of view, but lacking of the most valuable grace. If his words jar on the ear, we instinctively feel that his personal comeliness is of very small account. He may have the personal grace of an angel, but if his *"throat is an open sepulchre,"* his very beauty of form becomes a nauseating mockery. On the other hand a person of plain features becomes positively desirable in our eyes if his mind as expressed in his speech is fair and beautiful. He may even be ugly, and his very ugliness becomes the pleasant symbol of his excellence. The surpassing fairness of the King lies in the grace of his speech linked with power. His enemies bore witness to it in the days of his flesh:

"Whence hath this man this wisdom?"

"They were astonished at his doctrine."

"Never man spake like this man."

Whence came this extraordinary, this superhuman grace? The psalm says it was "poured into his lips." How? from what source? We have only to know who he is to see the full answer. He was no mere earthborn. He could say to the Jews:

"Ye are from beneath: I am from above."

His name tells the mystery of his excellence—Yahhoshua, in English pronounced Jesus.

"The Father dwelleth in me." "God was in Christ."

We understand how, when we remember his inception. (*"The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee (Mary): the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee*), and when we follow him to the banks of the Jordan and behold the shaft of spirit-light rest on his head in the form of a dove, and hear the voice—

"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power."

When we remember these things, we are at no loss to understand the supernal grace that characterised the Son of David. He was a spring from the Eternal Fountain.

As the Psalm unfolds his picture, there are things that are surprising from the popular point of view. They are in harmony with every exhibition of the Messiah to be met with in the Scriptures: but they are at variance with the traditions of ecclesiastical theology. According to these, the grace that makes Christ fairer than the children of men is the grace of a sublime meekness that can never be ruffled: a benignity that can never be disturbed: a beneficence that can never shine in self-assertion or frown in displeasure at the wicked. This is an artificial view. Christ is the perfection of meekness and beneficence; but there is another side which we see here:

"Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies, whereby the people fall under thee."

Here is a spectacle of executive power which, though foreign to popular conceptions of Christ, forms a natural part of the perfection of the King appointed. He who is to bless mankind must be able to expel the ungodly from place, power and possession. He must be

one who can punish the wicked, and teach the world righteousness by the overpowering display of the power of God. His meekness and kindness and righteousness, unsupported by acts of vengeance and retribution would be unheeded and contemned and uninfluential in a lawless world like this. There is no flaw in God's arrangements. He who, in fit time, was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and stood like a sheep before its shearers dumb, opening not his mouth, will yet cause the world to tremble with the lion-roars of his mouth.

"He shall not fail, nor be discouraged till he have set judgment in the earth"
(Isa. 42:4).

"Faithful and true, in righteousness doth he judge and make war. His eyes as a flame of fire, on his head many crowns . . . Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword that with it he should smite the nations and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev. 19:11-15).

At his coming, he will break in pieces and consume all kingdoms of the earth preliminary to the establishment of his own power (Dan. 2:44; 7:15). He will take vengeance on them that know not God or obey not the gospel (2 Thess 1:8), chief among whom is the Roman man of Sin, —

"Whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and destroy with the brightness of his coming"
(2 Thess. 2:8).

He will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen (Haggai 2:22). Then shall his kingdom be established, and *"the isles shall wait for his law."*

All this is contemplated in the words next addressed to the King in the psalm before us:

"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou lovedst righteousness and hatest iniquity. Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

Here are two beautiful *"things of the kingdom"* brought to our view. The kingdom will be truly a kingdom of righteousness, and it will have no end. What restfulness and joy of life is meant by righteous government. In the present state of things, public life of all kinds is a thing of hurry and worry and fright. It is only fit for the human dogs and sharks that disport themselves voraciously in its turbid and boisterous waters. You cannot go to the meanest rate office without feeling that you are in touch with a merciless machinery that will grind you to powder in the name of law. There is no mercy or justice in legal process. It is an affair of soulless technicality. It cannot, of course, be otherwise in human hands: but so it is. What a change when technicality will be unknown, except as a convenience, and kindness and justice will be the inspiration of all law and its administration. The humble and the widow and the orphan will not then find the world such a dreadful place. The King is a shepherd and not a wolf: his servants, lovers and friends, and not bone-gnawing foxes.

"He shall lead his flock like a shepherd, and gather the lambs with his arms."

"He shall judge for the poor and the needy, and save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor. Men shall be blessed in him"—not blighted and cursed and withered.

Then to think that the head and fountain of all authority will have risen to his position through that very ordeal of personal probation, through which all the children of God are made to pass—probation with reference to those principles of righteousness then triumphant in the Kingdom, but which are now of so little account,

"Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity. Therefore God hath exalted thee."

What encouragement to us while the vision tarries. It enables us to feel that however much it may appear to be in vain for a man to serve God, and to stand upon scruples dictated by His law, it is very, very far from being what it seems.

"Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart."

"Unto the upright, there ariseth light in the darkness."

For our proper trial, the darkness must prevail for a time. Sometimes it may prevail with an intensity of inhospitable coldness added to the darkness that seems to extinguish all hope, but it is only for a time. Hold on.

"Weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning."

It is the morning of Messiah's long and glorious day. It will break upon our night, and show us light and gladness that will fill our mouths with laughter and our lips with singing: We have God's own word for it:

"They shall not be ashamed that wait for me."

We shall yet say,

"The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

The glory and comfort of the Kingdom are portrayed in the second half of the psalm. We are so accustomed to suffering and dishonour as God's appointment for the narrow way that we may have a difficulty in realising the great change that God purposes for His friends. As some one has said, "The present always seems for ever." But the future will come, however long the present lasts. And it is a future all sweet and good without alloy. It has been written,

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived what God hath laid up for those who love and serve him."

This is true, though—

"God hath revealed it unto us by his Spirit."

We get glimpses here and there. It is mostly in figures and similitudes. So in this case:

"All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad. King's daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir. . . with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the King's palace."

It would not be possible to suggest more graphically scenes of gorgeous beauty and delight—coming after the establishment of the King's power by acts of judgment: the delicious odour of spices; the beautiful purity of ivory dwellings; the splendour and grace of royal women—combine to ravish the senses.

A practical application is thrown in having special interest for us. "King's daughters" are mentioned, and then there is this invitation:

"Hearken, O daughter, and consider and incline thine ear: forget also thine own people and thy father's house. So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty, for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him."

Considering that the King is Christ beyond all contradiction or doubt, in view of the frequent applications of the psalm to him in the letters of the apostles, what meaning can there be but one to this proposed espousal?

"I have espoused you to one husband," says Paul, "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).

It is neither more nor less than an invitation from the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth to poor earth worms to come into His glorious family. It is for "him that hath ears to hear." It is on a par with the pathetic adjuration of Isaiah 55.

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. Buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?” And again, “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.”

The glory of the invitation is not now manifest. People are apt to dismiss the matter as being sentimental. It is far from that. It is a proposal of substantial and lasting goodness of the highest order, as all will see those who attain to it stand in the bright presence of the King—themselves desirable and most blessed, and offering to the King a worship that will not come short of rapture. The lowest in the Kingdom will be objects of the highest attention on the part of the great of the earth.

“The daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift: the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour.”

Tyre, at the time the psalm was written, was the wealthy emporium of maritime commerce. It was a synonym for the riches of the sea. Tyre also was a friendly power in the day of Israel’s glory—in alliance with Solomon. The anti-type in the day of the greater than Solomon will be seen in the attitude of a greater than Tyre. The wealth of the sea in this latter day is centred in Britain. This will be at Israel’s service in the day of their restoration, as it is written:

*“The abundance of the sea shall be converted (that is, turned) unto thee . . . Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, **their silver and their gold with them.**”*

Consider what is involved, then, in this allusion to the latter-day daughter of Tyre, and “*the rich among the people.*” They are to be “*there with a gift.*” They are to entreat the favour of Christ’s accepted people. His people are those who believe, love, and obey him, now in his absence, when “*darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people.*” These at present are “*the offscourings of all things.*” The mighty people of “Society,” whether in London or the provinces (Oh, how lofty are their eyes!) would not deign to bestow a look upon them, as they sweep past in their fine equipages. What a gratifying change to all lovers of righteousness when these lordly folks forget their pride in the terrible events which in that day will exalt the Lord alone and His chosen; and come bowing abjectly, like Joseph’s brethren, for a crumb of recognition at the hands of the humblest of Christ’s accepted people. It is no picture of the fancy or wild thought of fanaticism. It rests on the word and purpose of Him who humbled Pharaoh before a flock-master, and brought the necks of Canaan’s kings under the heel of Joshua’s officers. It is not in the power of man to expunge this oracle from the written records of the earth:

“According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show marvellous things. And the nations shall see and be confounded at all their might . . . they shall lick the dust like a serpent; they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth. They shall be afraid of the Lord our God and shall fear because of thee” (Micah 7:15, 17);

“The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day” (Isa. 2:11).

The figurative “King’s daughter” who is to be thus elevated in public life, “*to praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Christ,*” would need to be worthy of such exaltation, would she not? Of some we read, that they are “*not fit for the Kingdom of God.*” (The words are Christ’s.) We may be sure that those who are “*not fit for the Kingdom of God*” will not enter therein. Christ is judge of the fitness: and he has specified it beforehand. It is graphically figured in this Psalm:

*“The king’s daughter is all glorious **within**: her clothing is of wrought gold.”*

The excellence is internal:

“Man looketh on the outward appearance. The Lord looketh on the heart.”

A certain **state of mind** is essential to acceptability. What that is, is abundantly revealed in the apostolic epistles which may be said to be the fashion book of the king's daughter. The leading feature is hinted at in "*the clothing of wrought gold.*" Gold is the constant symbol of faith worked up by love into various forms of practical service. What is pleasanter in a friend than that completeness and ardour of conviction that leads to ready action? We are friends of God if this is our state in relation to Him and His affairs. This faith without it, we cannot please God. He has so informed us, and we may as well accept it once for all as a first principle not to be questioned. It is a reasonable requirement: for what an insipid company of people would half believers be. We shall have undergone a great change of nature before we stand in the presence of the King "*all glorious within,*" with clothing of wrought gold; but even then, the crowning beauty of the elect of God will be the ardent faith that overcomes the world in these times of trial.

The greatness of the position to which the King's daughter is called accounts for what is demanded of her meantime:

"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear: FORGET ALSO THINE OWN PEOPLE and thy father's house. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty."

This denotes affectionate preference for "*the things that are Jesus Christ's,*" and separation from friendships that have their basis in merely natural things. Both must appear in the highest degree reasonable in the eyes of those who have attained to full conviction concerning Christ; and when Christ comes they will appear reasonable in the eyes of those who have not so attained. How could a man be fit for the society of Christ who did not value him at his real worth, or who was so badly instructed as to think other men and things on some degree of level with him? How could a man be fit for the Kingdom of God whose heart is with those who know not God, and obey not the Gospel? This is the state of things with "*thine own people and thy father's house*" everywhere. The divine invitation is to "*forget*" them. Christ's command is relatively to "*hate*" them: Paul's command is to "*come out from among them.*" The flesh is a flower that blooms but for a moment. It is great with the children of the flesh everywhere. In all times and places it vanishes away: yet they learn not the lesson. Be not enslaved by the universal folly: but "*consider, and incline thine ear.*" Open thy heart wide to "*the things of the Spirit of God.*" So will you become interesting to the King, who will greatly desire the beauty of the new man formed within thee. "*In raiment of needlework*" will you be presented for the wedding: even in the fully-manifested and recognised deeds of righteousness begotten of faith in long-forgotten times, but now remembered and proclaimed with divine commendation, which will be praise worth having. The cup of gladness will be filled complete with the addition of "*virgin companions,*" even an innumerable company of angels, who will cooperate as the servitors of the saints, and minister to the glory, honour, and peace of the Father's newly-begotten servants and sons.

"With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought, and enter into the King's palace."

"Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children;"—

For in a thousand years wedlock with the glorious Bridegroom, the Bride, the Lamb's wife, will bring forth a glorious family of rejoicing sons of God, who shall inherit the earth for ever. The endless ages beyond will give full scope for the fulfilment of the final promise.

"I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever."

Taken from: - "The Christadelphian" of 1891
Sunday Morning No. 215

Pages 93-97
By Bro. Robert Roberts