

THE BREAKING OF BREAD.

Our meeting this morning has a meaning which is appreciated by those only who understand the truth, and by few of them as it ought to be. By the world without, it is regarded with quiet scorn. They see in it nothing but an idle ceremony-an effete piece of sacerdotalism- the lingering shadow of an ancient superstition. They may respect those who persevere in it from week to week; they may approvingly regard them as at least persons of sincerity, who act consistently with their professed convictions: but their respect is mixed with pity for what they consider weakness, and regret that honest purpose should be thrown away on what they regard as a bootless enterprise.

Their feelings are also strongly tinctured with a resentful contempt for the implied condemnation of their own position; for of course our being right involves that they are fatally wrong. Indeed, this implied condemnation is at the bottom of all the hostility ever shown by the world towards those who walk in the way of God. "Only admit that we are right also," say they, "and we will agree to differ": but this is just what the believers of the Gospel cannot do; hence the traditional "enmity." We have to thank God that we live in a day when the world has no power to give practical effect to its hostile feelings against the friends of Christ. There was a day when the law of the land would not have permitted us to assemble as we do this morning. There was a day when we should have been compelled to take refuge in the privacy of forest and glen, in order to carry out our Master's injunction to break bread in remembrance of him. But that day is gone, and gone for ever. The termination of the Papal ascendancy for 1,260 years is in no way more distinctly marked than in the total disappearance of all power on the part of the system personally and geographically headed up in Rome, to coerce the weakest of mankind against their conscience. The saints were "*given into his hand*" for time, and times and-a- half; that period is at an end, notwithstanding the attempts to prove the contrary by such as delight to say "*My Lord delayeth his coming.*" Consequently, everywhere under heaven the saints are "out of the hand" of the apostasy, and at liberty, in any country where they may exist, (Even in Rome itself, where Protestants meet, and Bibles circulate under the very walls of the Vatican.) to assemble, in obedience to the injunction which brings us together this morning.

Nevertheless, the contempt of the world is a trial of a certain sort; the faithlessness of some professing the Name who say, "who hath required this at your hands?" is a trial of another sort. The uncertainty of the time of the Lord's coming, notwithstanding the general and unmistakable indications that we are in the time of the end, and that he is at the door, forms another trial. The situation is rife with trials. What shall we say to this? There is but one enlightened answer. The heart enlightened in the principles on which God deals with all whom He chooses, instead of growing weary under trials, will, like Paul and his brother James, "*count it all joy*" to be thus put to the test. Trial is the order of the House of God; and in our day, when the sword is taken out of the hand of the magistrate, it is necessary, if we are to belong to this House, that we be put on a par with our brethren of past ages, by having trials in a form adapted to our time of freedom and privilege. A right view of the case will make us welcome these when they come. Paul said, in the view of the meaning of his sufferings: "*I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake.*" A spiritual view of our affairs will lead us to entertain a similar sentiment with regard to those things we may be called on to endure through our identification with and our service of the one faith. They are far from agreeable: if they were agreeable, they would not answer their purpose, which is, that by the mental exercise

induced, we may become partakers of the Father's holiness. Pleasure would not exercise us in this direction, but contrariwise.

There is another pleasant side to *"the sufferings of this present time"*; they prepare a sweet future in a special sense. The joy of our deliverance will be in the ratio of our present sense of trouble. And this deliverance is not a far off. *"Though it tarry, wait for it."* This is the Spirit's counsel. Suddenly, in the midst of our commonplace life, our ears will be made to tingle with the announcement that our waiting is past—that our warfare is accomplished—that the Lord is in the earth. For this, we are being prepared by evil and delay.

Meanwhile, it is ours to be steadfast. The Lord has not yet come; and we are to continue at this *"till he come,"* unmoved by the instabilities everywhere manifesting themselves around us. The times are perilous for such as *"have no root in themselves,"* and even for those whose feet are on the track, there is danger. Let us be on our guard. We hear of brethren forsaking the table of the Lord, and counselling all others to give it up as an institution of men. We hear of brethren denying the righteousness of God as revealed in the Gospel from faith to faith; teaching that no man is saved by the Gospel, and that none need to be baptised. Many other vagaries are floating in the air, unsubstantial as the phantom ship, but for the time appearing as real. The circumstances impose on us the necessity for keeping close to the holy oracles in all things. We need not be surprised that some are inconstant and movable. In Paul's day, there was a disposition to be *"carried about of every wind of doctrine,"* which called from him words of warning. There were men of cunning craftiness lying in wait to deceive, and some who were ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. There were those who, notwithstanding the warnings of the apostles, gave ear to evil men and seducers, who, with good words and fair speeches, drew away disciples after them, deceiving and being deceived. These in the old age of John had multiplied to *"many antichrists."* If this were so in the days of inspiration, we must not blind our eyes to similar possibilities in our time. We have the consolation that the second apostasy, which is now stalking through the brotherhood, will not be allowed to extinguish the truth a second time. It is comforting to know that the Lord, at his coming, finds some who are ready (Matthew 25: 10); some who will not taste of death (1 Corinthians 15: 51; 1 Thessalonians 4: 17); some, who in the midst of a general forgetfulness of the Lord's coming, will be *"found watching"* (Luke 12: 37); and, therefore, some who will steer safely through all the complications, snares, pitfalls, and dangers of the latter days, and remain steadfast to the end in the one faith and practice of the apostles. If "some" are to found of the Lord, at his coming in this blessed case, we may be amongst them. To be so found will require the exercise of vigilance and great circumspection, the more so as God has permitted the uprise of clever perverters, capable, almost, of deceiving the very elect. Those who slacken their vigilance, are in danger of being taken captive to their destruction.

The table is a centre point round which the disciples will be found assembling themselves to the very day of the Lord's appearing. Like the first-century disciples, they will to the last *"continue steadfast in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers"* (Acts 2: 42). They will be found in the observance of all things which Jesus commanded the apostles (Matthew 28: 20). Among these "all things" is this beautiful memorial supper which combines so many interesting, sublime, and comforting features. Here we have the Lord represented in our midst. At the time he instituted it, he was at the table himself with his disciples, partaking with them. Their eyes rested on him whom to worship is not idolatry, and whom to love with our utmost devotion is a duty springing out of his own commandments. We cannot so look on him as they looked. We are assembled in his

name, and he is, doubtless, cognizant of and attentive to us; but we lack the refreshing satisfaction of those who *"saw, and heard and handled the Word of life"* (1 John 1: 1). Yet this lack may prove much in our ultimate favour. It may ensure to us the blessedness expressed in the words of the Lord when he said to Thomas, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Will it not be a great joy on that day to see himself, after assembling so many times in his absence in remembrance of him? What a glorious termination to our patience to be permitted to sit down at the higher table in the kingdom of God! It will come. We shall see him then as really as his disciples saw him when he rose and gird himself with a towel, and poured water and washed their feet; but we shall see him in happier circumstances. We shall realise the full blessedness of the words he spoke when he said, *"Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching. Verily, I say unto you that he shall gird himself and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."* Our eyes will rest upon him with a rapturous sweetness when we behold him the living omnipotent fountain of the covenanted blessedness which is to prevail to the utmost bounds of the habitable globe. We shall shout for joy when permitted to share his everlasting life, and *"sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God."* In the days of his flesh, men *"wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth."* What shall be our admiration in the day of his glory, when his superlative excellence in word and demeanour will not only be seen with our own eyes, and heard with our own ears, but seen and heard with such enlarged capacity to appreciate and enjoy! We shall be like them that dream. Our mouth will be filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. We shall say, *"The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."* Of all these glorious things we are reminded by the recollection that he broke bread 1,800 years ago, and said to his disciples, *"Do this in remembrance of me."*

Then this breaking of bread brings home to us the fact that before his exaltation, he was truly our brother—born of our common nature, a partaker of all our afflictions, standing in our position, bearing our sins, tasting our death, made in all things like unto his brethren. There is comfort in the thought that he trod the same path we are now treading, coming through the same experience of weakness, trial, faith and hope. There is force in the declaration that we have not an High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. There is strength for us in the fact that his sympathy is real and active; that though now exalted, he has not lost the memory of his woes, but remembers the time when he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Were he still a man, he might have forgotten this long ago. The human brain is so feebly retentive of impressions that restoration to health soon wipes out the recollection of pain. The spiritual nature differs from the natural in this. Being the Divine nature, its powers of recollection are like the source from which it springs—the Eternal Spirit, to whom nothing is ever forgotten. Here is, doubtless, one cause of the Deity's principle of prefacing eternal good with a period of trial and suffering. A distinct memory of that evil will be an element in the everlasting joy that is promised. The keenest enjoyments are those that immediately succeed the greatest sufferings. Take for illustration (inelegant perhaps, but forcible) the common case of toothache. A person suddenly relieved from this experiences a degree of pleasure which the man who has no toothache does not feel, and which the sufferer himself will lose when the memory of his pain subsides. So long as the memory of his pain continues, the sweetness of relief is keen to the taste. If the memory of pain could be perpetuated, the delightful sensation of relief would be continued also; but because the pain-memory fades, the pleasure of relief fades also. There can be little doubt that in the spirit-nature, the memory of the present evil will be perpetuated, and thus the joy of salvation be ever fresh and

delightful. It is on this principle that Jesus can after so long a time be touched with the feeling of our infirmity.

The breaking of this loaf also reminds us that it pleased Jehovah to put His beloved Son to grief; that Jesus was not only made of a woman for us, and made subject to obedience for us, but died for us. The dread mystery of the Father's love is herein manifest. He loved us and was willing to forgive us, but first compelled us, in His beloved, to bow before the majesty of His sovereign supremacy, which was slighted in Eden, and set at naught in many generations. We do reverence to His great and holy Name in taking this broken bread in our hands, in token of our community with the solemn transaction of Calvary.

Above all, we remember his resurrection; that though crucified through weakness, he liveth by the power of God, and at the appointed time—the time of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets—he will re-appear and bring with him times of much refreshing from on high. The memory of these things is able to strengthen us in the days and conditions of our pilgrimage. It reconciles us to the position of strangers and sojourners, as all the fathers were, having here no continuing city, but seeking one to come, and that a glorious one, possessing all those attributes of righteousness, holiness, knowledge and love, which will gladden our hearts with inexpressible joy, and cause us to join in loud and thankful praises to Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb. Well may we say to each other: *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."*

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