

OUR GATHERING TO CHRIST

We read of *“our gathering together unto him.”* We also read that we are to *“forsake not the assembling of ourselves together.”* These are two different things, but closely related. The one is voluntary, the other compulsory; the one present, the other future. The one is the nature of a performance, which with other things, will determine our good standing on the occurrence of the other.

Our *“gathering together”* this morning is not a *“gathering unto him”*, except in a sense. He is the idea that brings us together, and he can be with us, unknown to us, when we thus come together to call him to remembrance and to show forth his death until he come; but very different will be our gathering together unto him, in the day of his appearing. At present, it is *“whom having not seen, we love;”* then, in many cases it will be *“whom having not loved we see”* but in many cases also *“whom having loved we see; lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”* It is for this gathering together that we are waiting and preparing. It will certainly come. We have to make war with our senses in this matter. There are many things in which our senses cannot be trusted. Understanding and memory have come to the aid of our senses, and tell us things our senses for the moment would deny. How otherwise would we know that we were once puling babes in the cradle, nay, that we once were not at all? How otherwise could we know that we shall certainly pass away from this scene in due course? Those who trust merely to their senses are victimised on both points, and behave with the pride and forgetfulness that are foolish and destructive. They look out on the world around them and see that it always looks exactly the same, always babies, always youths, always middle-aged people, always the old. If they use not their understanding, they will fail to see that it is a shifting scene, like a passing panorama; that life is *“but a vapour that appeareth for a very little while and then vanisheth away.”*

Failing to see this, they will live foolishly and not wisely, and lament it bitterly at the latter end. The exercise of their understanding will show them that life at any moment is but part of a process that has a beginning and an end, and that it is only wisely used in being adjusted to that which is before and after it—the everlasting, the self-existing, the eternal God, the constitutor and upholder, who faints not, neither is weary, and there is no searching of His understanding.

The same exercise of the understanding will soon show us that *“our gathering together unto him”* is a certainty, as certain as the ending of life, and a certainty we have the same reason for entertaining, viz., that it is part of a process going forward before our eyes. The second coming of Christ had a first; and the first is past, and has left its mark and evidence before the eyes of all men who will but open their eyes to see. It is not an affair of recondite investigation.

“This thing was not done in a corner.”

It is a blazing fact to the universal gaze, though men, mostly burrowing in cellars, cannot see it. The constitution of human life in Europe in “Church and State” at the present moment, and the history of the establishment of the name of Christ among men, are the palpable pledges that ordinary intelligence applies to the fact that Christ is the central reality of human history, and that *“having once in the end of the (Mosaic) world, appeared and put away sin by the sacrifice of himself”* he will as certainly at the appointed time, *“appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”* It is the part of wise men, therefore, to seek to realise the bearing of this stupendous fact. Christ has not died or changed since the day he *“showed himself alive after his sufferings by many infallible proofs.”* He has not ceased to be the glorious personage that appeared to persecuting Saul on the road to Damascus, changing him into *“our beloved brother Paul, with labours more abundant”* than all the apostles. He has not ceased to live since the day he declared to John in the Isle of Patmos,

“I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.”

What is there in our surroundings that is incompatible with his existence and reappearance in due time? Does the blue sky interfere? Are the mountains a barrier? Does the rushing wind preclude him? Does the fair face of the earth shut him off? Your houses, your businesses, your tools; yea, your feelings, your eatings and sleepings and goings about? Do they in any wise interfere with his immortal reality or make it in any degree

difficult for him to return in power and great glory? These things did not interfere with your appearing on the scene, --frail child of the earth out of non-existence. Why should they offer any barrier to the appointed, promised, needed, irresistible coming again to the earth of him who is earth's deliverer and owner? Nay, they offer none. Get rid of the hallucinations of sense, the narrow-minded language of the eye, which requires interpretation. Open the heart fully to the invigorating power of the truth, that he who was once "*despised and rejected of men*," and nailed to the "*accursed tree*," raised from the dead, and removed from the earth during a season of preparation, will by the same word come again at the appointed end of the preparation, and take to himself his great power and reign. It is then we may look for "our gathering together unto him." What are we gathered for? For as many things as may be stored for us in the glorious and endless future. But there is first of all one thing we are gathered for which is profitable for us now to have very distinctly and always before our minds. We are gathered for individual account and judgment. No part of the Truth is more prominent than this,

"Every one of us must give account of himself to God."

"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

Consider this ye who labour in the way of righteousness under much reproach, and with much apparent futility, feeling often as if all were in vain. Consider it also ye who live in the selfish satisfaction of prosperity, and "are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." God said by the prophet—

"Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

This is practically what he says to us by the apostles. Our gathering together to Christ for judgment is a meeting with God. The meeting will be very impressive in its accessories. It would be awe-striking if it were a meeting with Christ, who in the days of his flesh, could read the hearts of all men; this impressive meeting will not be with Christ alone, who can see through a man and has power over all flesh. But the meeting is before our fellow candidates for life eternal, whose numbers (embracing multitudes of the dead) are very great. Not only they, but the angels are present in multitudes. Jesus says so frequently:

"The Son of Man shall come, and all the holy angels with him."

John, in Patmos, saw them in vision:

"The number of them was ten thousand, times ten thousand and thousands of thousands"
(Rev. 5:11).

Such a vastness of concourse would seem to us to be inconsistent with judicial cognisance and individual detail. It would seem as if persons must be lost in such an endless crowd. It would be so in a mere mortal multitude. But we must remember that the embracing presence of the Spirit of God will make a great difference on this point. It will gather up the whole assembly into one comfortable unity, as we might say, in which all will be cognisant of everything that Christ says and does, and of every person who is the subject of his remark. And now to have your case exhibited to the cognisance of such an assembly; will it not make your honour great, if honour it is to be? Will it not make your shame overwhelming if your case meet not with the Judge's approbation? It is no fanciful prospect, it is as certain as our birth and death. Does not that contemplation predispose us to conform to the standard of what will be acceptable then? Does not this inspire us to put the proper small valuation on public opinion and human thought? The Bible light of a thing is in very low esteem with mankind at present. It will shine out then as the only light by which men and things can be truly determined. The light created by mere human sentimentalities of all kinds makes a blaze in public life for the time being but it is a mere naphtha lamp glare hiding the light of the stars. Christ is the light of the world, however effete robust mortals may for the time being consider the sentiment. All other light will be found false at last.

"Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks that ye kindled. This shall ye have of Mine hand: ye shall lie down in sorrow" (Isa. 50:11).

Practically and literally, the right preparedness for the solemn crisis that is coming consists of having the mind imbued with Bible ways of looking at things and the life conformed to such a state of mind. If in this

we fail, it is from no lack of opportunity. The Bible is with us. We have not to wait till God speaks. He has spoken. In a very real sense may Christ say to us all what he said to the brethren at Laodicea:

“Behold I stand at the door and knock.”

He is at the door all the time. He is knocking all the time in the message he has put on permanent record, and in the meantime he has providentially employed to bring it within our reach. We have but to open the door. This requires us to go out of our way a little. If we do not make it a habit to read the Bible, in a daily and systematic manner, if we never attend assemblies where his mind is displayed and his name recorded, our door remains shut and he cannot become our guest. A wise man will open the door and let him in. What then? He likens himself to a caller having wares to offer for sale.

“Buy of me gold tried in the fire.”

This is always the figure of a tried faith. That he should ask us to buy this article from him may at first appear strange. This appearance vanishes when we remember the nature and origin of faith. It is the conviction of things hoped for because they are promised. This cannot be acquired anywhere else except at the hands of Christ. Away from him, there is no ground of conviction. For away from him there are no promises, while *“in him the promises are yea, and amen.”* The faith in them that leads to victory cannot be got by studying law, or medicine, or politics, or any other system of human knowledge. It can only be acquired by giving the mind to him in that attention which he knocks that he may receive. But *“faith tried in the fire”*: how can we buy this of him? It may seem that we may buy the faith of him, but that the trial of that faith is an affair of our own experience. Well, faith that does not stand the trial of affliction is no faith of any value, and it could not be that he would ask us to buy a valueless faith. And the faith that does stand the test of real trial is a faith that does so because of what it is in itself. A true and sterling and superhuman thing; and this character it owes entirely to the source of its emanation and therefore in the ultimate sense, it is *“gold tried in the fire”* that we buy of him when we acquire the faith that overcomes the world. Why does he ask us to buy this *“gold tried in the fire?”* *“That thou mayest be rich.”* This implies that we are poor apart from it. This is certainly the case. However much the appearance of things may lie the contrary way, however worthless enlightenment in Christ and conformity to his ways may seem—however superior may seem the standing of the man who gets on in the world and “goes in” for what is well estimated by the current generation—it will appear at the last that wealth is the appanage of him only who has obtained the favour of God on account of his faith in Christ and conformity to his commandments. It is merely a question of time. The earth and all it contains will certainly be transferred to Christ and his brethren at the right season; and it will then be apparent to all how poverty-stricken are the mortals who have neglected the acquisition of *“the gold tried in the fire,”* however sumptuously they may have surrounded themselves meanwhile with the honour and good things of this life which passes away. They are no empty words in which Jesus comforts the poor in this world who are rich in faith:

“Blessed be ye poor; yours is the Kingdom of God. But woe unto you that are rich (or God neglecting class), for ye have received your consolation.”

So also Jesus offers *“white raiment that thou mayest be clothed”*—another of the Spirit’s beautiful figures of speech—a figure explained.

“The fine linen is the righteousness of the saints.”

The offer of this fine linen implies that we are not of ourselves suitably arrayed for presentation at the heavenly court. And this is indeed the case, as we learn more and more thoroughly as we grow in divine knowledge. The mental panoply of the natural mind—the ideas and notions and moods which a human being evolves from his unenlightened mind—are not such as to fit him for divine society.

“All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.”

We need a clothing supplied to us of divine manufacture. This is provided in Christ. He is made righteousness to us, and how we may stand clad in him has been revealed. Our reception of him with the heart by faith in the understanding and affectionate acceptance of the Truth and docile submission to its requirements, puts us in the position that Paul affirmed of himself; *“found of him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith.”* A man’s faith in Christ is *“counted to him for righteousness,”* if it be a faith working by love and bringing forth the fruits of obedience. On account of it all

his past sins are forgiven and he stands “*complete in him who is the head of all principality and power.*” Such a man has bought white raiment in which his natural nakedness is clothed. A man who has not submitted to these requirements—who is ignorant of the gospel and indifferent to Christ, and uncontrolled by any regard to his commandments, is a man without the white raiment which Christ asks men to buy. He may be a decent man as men go; but he is a sinner as Adam was, and if his sins are unforgiven, he is in no better position than Adam when sentenced to death. Adam’s offence was “*one*”; how many are the offences of his unjustified children? What hope can there be, if we have not submitted to the gospel? And “*eyesalve that thou mayest see,*” this implies that apart from Christ, men are troubled with false sight. Oh, how true this is. Men do not see truly if they do not see that Christ is everything for man, and that life apart from him is a troubled meteor, rushing across the sky of night to disappear in darkness for ever. This is considered mawkish sentiment. But let men study the facts of the case—let them turn their attention to Christ as exhibited in the prophetic and apostolic oracles, let them ponder life as pressed home upon us in its histories and issues, and they will see that as a matter of sober fact, that man only sees the universe of life in a true light whose mental eyesight is bountifully anointed with the Truth of which Christ, and Christ alone, is the embodiment. It is no superfluous exhortation that enjoins us to anoint our eyes with eyesalve that we may see.

Before finishing, note two points,

- (1) The prominence of the personality of Christ in the counsel he gives.
- (2) The dependence of results upon the exertion he invites us to put forth.

“*Buy of me,*” says he, as much as to say “*apply nowhere else.*”—This gives him a high and central place. It is the command of wisdom, for in no other direction can we obtain the things of peerless value signified by gold tried in the fire, white raiment, etc. Every department of human knowledge to which we may turn is absolutely barren of that which makes for life eternal. In Christ, and in Christ alone, “*are hid all the treasures,*” in this respect, means treasure in all respects at last. Yet we would not listen wisely if we failed to realise that in listening to Christ, we are listening to the Spirit of God. We are not listening merely to an excellent personage as we might listen to a friend, but to one who is the mouth of the Eternal. What he utters in these messages is “*what THE SPIRIT SAITH to the ecclesias,*” as the close of each message declares.

As to the other point—the relation of our personal effort to the results proposed—this is conspicuous all through. “*Buy*”, “*Repent*”, “*Overcome*”, “*Do the first works,*” etc. A false theology has obliterated this feature and paralysed human exertion in divine directions with the result of abounding sterility on all hands. There is a place where human effort is of no avail whatever—namely, outside that position in Christ to which God invites men on the belief and obedience of the gospel in baptism. But inside that position, effort determines everything. And if we put forth no effort—in reading, in prayer, in assembling, in testifying the Truth, in doing good as we have opportunity—we must sink supine into the position of the “*wicked and slothful servant,*” who, returning his talent to his Lord unused, was cast out into the outer darkness. Be it ours to trade diligently with the talents confided to us, that we may be among the happy number to whom—it will be said, “*Well done, good and faithful servants.*”

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