

PRESENT REST

We know the truth of the popular saying, “out of sight, out of mind.” The Lord has been out of sight of his brethren for over 1,800 years, and he would have been liable to get out of their minds also if he had not provided this ordinance of the breaking of bread by which he is in a measure kept in their remembrance. It is a most beautiful and most fitting ordinance in every way. It not only brings him specially before us once in seven days, but it brings him before us in an aspect especially suited to our present needs. It is not in the aspect of power or glory that we are invited to contemplate him in this broken bread and poured out blood, but in that of suffering. We are reminded that he was a sufferer: that it pleased the Lord to bruise him. Our own part at present is very much one of suffering, and we are entitled to bear it properly by the exhibition of this body given and this blood shed. We are made to realise that the first stage of our development as sons of God is necessarily one of humiliation, and that in this stage the Lord himself has preceded us, in having been made to “*learn obedience by the things that he suffered*,” as is testified. In these two significances, the breaking of bread has great value.

But there is another meaning which we are slow to take in, perhaps, and yet which lies at the root of the matter. Why was the Lord called upon to suffer? Why was the Holy One commanded to allow himself to be put to death by sinners? “*This commandment*” he said, he had “*received of the Father*,” and he prayed unavailingly in the garden of Gethsemane that the cup might pass from him. It has to do with the greatness of God and the smallness of man. He has said—

“*I will be exalted.*”

He has said—

“*I will be sanctified—(held in reverence and deepest and highest honour)—“in them that approach unto Me.*”

He has said—

“*Come unto me.*”

“*Look unto me.*”

“*Draw nigh to me.*”

“*Come out from among the unclean, and I will receive you.*”

But between these two points—the point at which man is invited, and the point at which his compliance is accepted lies this awful ceremony of holiness, — the condemnation of sin in the public crucifixion of one who bore the sin nature, but who was himself obedient in all things. A condemnation with which we are required to identify ourselves in the ceremony appointed for the purpose—baptism into his death. We do not “show forth the Lord’s death” to any effectual purpose if we do not see the terrible majesty of God which was vindicated in it. The principle is illustrated to us in the vision of the seraphim covering head and body in the presence of God, and saying—

“*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts.*”

If the angels of His presence humble themselves thus before God, what attitude becomes mortal man but the very one provided in this institution: “*crucified with Christ*,” yet saying with Paul,

“Nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

We are here also to soothe ourselves with the words which he spoke. He spoke them for all who should be pleased to receive them. Many and precious they are—perhaps none more suited to our need than the ones before us in the words which have been read:

“I will give you rest.”

The idea of rest is agreeable to the weary, and we are all weary. We need not dwell on the physical weariness inseparable from *“this corruptible.”* All men agree on the need for “Nature’s sweet restorer”—that mysterious and healing suspension of consciousness that takes place, or ought to take place, when we lay our heads on the pillow. All are agreed as to the advantage of recurring seasons of holiday rest. But there is a weariness of which the world in general is not so directly conscious, and of which the rest that Christ speaks is the remedy. God said to Israel, in reference to their efforts to keep up style to please the neighbouring nations,

“Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way.”

So it may be said to the world in general, that it is weary in the emptiness of its way. It knows nothing of the sweet restfulness that belongs to Christ. Rest naturally belongs to his ways.

“Learn of me,” says he, *“for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”*

There is a *“rest that remaineth for the people of God”*—a rest that will as Isaiah says of Christ’s rest, *“be glorious in that day,”* but this is not the rest of which Christ here speaks. He is speaking of a present rest, which he otherwise speaks of as *“my peace”*—a peace, he says, which the world cannot give, a peace which Paul speaks of as—

“The peace of God that passeth all understanding, filling the heart and mind.”

“Let the peace of God dwell in your hearts, and be ye thankful.”

“Learn of me, I am meek and lowly of heart.”

This belongs to rest and peace. The violent and the arrogant do not and cannot know peace. It is not in the nature of things for the service of the lower faculties to bring rest and peace, but rather the reverse—unrest, unhappiness and fear. A contemplation of our own mental constitution will show us this (and we must remember that we are of divine workmanship—notwithstanding the abortive state in which we live). All the faculties to which Christ appeals are of a restful action. The worship of God; what peace there is in this. The love and service of neighbour; what sweetness is like it. It is well said that—

“The merciful man doeth good to his own soul; but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.”

Then take the action of faith and hope; no faculties are more calming and soothing to the mental man. So with conscientiousness or the sense of duty to which the law of Christ is one prolonged appeal. There is no satisfaction so pure and lasting as that which comes from the habit of doing things because they ought to be done—because they are right to be done and because we ought to do that which is right—quite apart from any other considerations. So also with the cultivation of the understanding—the pursuit of knowledge—the love of wisdom—there is no peace like the peace that comes with these. To all these Christ invites us

in asking us to learn of him, and under the power of all these we are brought when we surrender to the full obedience of his law, with the result that we “*find rest.*” In the world there is no rest. Ambition distends the mind with more gas; emulation is a feverish competition that leaves no joy behind; avarice is an appetite never satisfied. The life of the world as a picture may be bright, many-hued, and gaudy, but it is all a vain show that cheats and wounds the heart of every one that follows it. In Christ there is perfect peace, even in the midst of the tribulation that is inseparable from the life of faith.

But there is a higher ingredient in the “*rest*” that Christ offers. It relates to a heavier burden than any that belongs to the present life. Paul speaks of those that “*through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*” This fear, we know, arises out of sin. Solomon tells us that “*fools make a mock at sin.*” It is no new thing, therefore, for a man to make light of sin. Sin is a terrible reality though scouted in our generation as a pious myth. Let us not be diverted from wisdom in this matter by the general folly. It is a matter of revelation that “*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,*” and that “*the wrath of God*” is operative against this state of things and will inflict “*tribulation and anguish, indignation and wrath upon every (responsible) soul of man that doeth evil*”—who will at last be “*punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power when he shall come to be glorified in his saints.*”

Now, to a reasonable man, it is a cause of much heaviness and distress of mind that he should be implicated in such a situation. We are all originally in this position. We have all to own with Paul that among the sinners that go to make up the present evil world,

“We all had our conversation in time past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath even as others”

(Eph. 2:2).

“At that time,” as he further says, “*we were without Christ . . . having no hope and without God in the world.*”

How is it possible that we could have rest and peace of mind in such a state of things? No amount of the exercise of veneration, benevolence, faith, hope, conscientiousness, observation, causality and comparison could bring peace under such a condition of alienation from God and condemnation by His law, any more than physical health could give peace to a man sentenced to be executed for treason. We require to be assured of God’s friendship, and of our reconciliation to Him through forgiveness. Here is emphatically where we find rest in Christ.

“Through this man is preached the forgiveness of sins.”

A forgiven man is at rest. “*God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven us,*” if we submit to Christ. There is no reconciliation in any other way. The reconciliation in this way is complete. This is what Paul calls—

“The ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.”

The conditions are simple, and we have complied with them.

“By him all that believe are justified” . . . that is, forgiven.

“He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved.”

“If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”

Christ crucified and raised is the way to reconciliation and peace for those who believe and obey, and for no other. And there is no other way,

“No man cometh unto the Father but by me.”

“I am the way.”

“There is none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved.”

These are the express declarations of revealed truth which compel us to stand aside from systems and thoughts around us that make human righteousness and human salvation independent of the work of Christ.

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus, by whom we have access into this grace wherein we stand.”

Thus we find rest. But there is one higher and final step. There is a future rest—a rest that remaineth—the prospect of which adds much to the rest we now enjoy in the confidence of the hope. Of the nature of that rest we learn something from Paul’s treatment of the subject in Hebrews 3 and 4. It comprises both locality and state. The locality comes before us in the reference to the failure of the Israelites who came out of Egypt to enter the land of promise:

“To whom swear He that they should not enter His rest but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.”

This remark is based on Psalm 95, in which Paul here declares *“the Holy Spirit saith”* (see ch. 3:7).

“I swear in My wrath that they should not enter into My rest” (ch. 3:11).

This is God’s own description of the Holy Land and all that its inheritance involves in His presence and favour. It is not the only place where the description occurs. In Psalm 132 it is still more plainly said (v. 13):

“The Lord hath chosen Zion: He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it.”

So also Moses speaks of the land as *“the rest and the inheritance of the Lord”* (Deut. 12:9). In the song that Moses and the children of Israel sang on the shores of the Red Sea on the morrow after the overthrow of the Egyptians, it is spoken of as—

“The mountain of Thine inheritance—the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in; the sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established” (Exodus 15:17).

It seems strange at first sight that a particular spot on the earth’s surface should be associated with the divine rest and pleasure, seeing that all the earth belongs to Him. But the thought changes when we reflect that if God indeed dwell on the earth, as He proposes to do, pitching His tabernacle among men for their deliverance at last from every curse, there must be some spots much more fitted for such a manifestation than others. The eternal snows of the North Pole, for example, would not be a suitable locality for the revelation of the glory of the Lord. Of all the places on earth, He necessarily knows which is the best, and the choice He has made shows it; for the land of Canaan, which He has promised as an everlasting inheritance to Abraham and his seed, is the glory of all lands—in whichever way you view it. It is, in a word, *“the glory of all lands,”* and well fitted to be *“the rest and the inheritance of the Lord,”* in the day when the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it

together. “Israel,” we are informed “*could not enter in because of unbelief*” (Heb. 3:19), upon which there is this suggestive comment in ch. 4:6,

“It remaineth that some must enter therein,” and in verse 1,

“Let us therefore fear lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”

This practical application of the matter, which is utterly unintelligible on the immortal soul hypothesis of the popular religionism of the day, is perfectly apparent on the principles of the Truth—the Gospel of the Kingdom founded on the promise made to the fathers. Instructed by the prophets, as expounded by Jesus and the apostles, we learn that the “*rest*” which was not attained under the Law in the hands of the typical Joshua will be reached under the new covenant in the hands of Jesus, the mediator thereof, at his coming, when “*His rest*,” as we read in Isaiah 11:10, “*shall be glorious.*”

“In that day shall the Branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel.”

“Thou shalt weep no more: the Lord shall be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry . . . in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of His people and healeth the stroke of their wound.”

“Your soul shall be as a watered garden: thou shalt not sorrow any more at all.”

“Ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

“For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.”

These are the great and precious promises—the “*fat things full of marrow*”—which the Spirit of God invites men to partake of instead of the empty notions and enterprises that men create for themselves. The question will press to the very last:

“Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live.”

Be it ours, brethren and sisters, to respond to this reasonable and loving challenge, and to be found among those who at the last shall enter into the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

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