

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 115

Both in our reading (Hebrews 3.) and in our singing this morning, we are invited to contemplate Jesus in an aspect at once most exalted and most comforting. It is that aspect of his position which we are perhaps the last to apprehend. Many features of the truth strike us and engage our attention long before we rise to the glory and comfort of his priesthood. The first effect of the truth is probably to fascinate the enlightened imagination with the glory of the kingdom, or more probably still, to startle the mind with the strangeness of the discovery that all the world should think man immortal when he was nothing but a vanishing creature of the ground. It is a while before these two salient features of the truth are sufficiently assimilated with the mental man to leave the mind at liberty to rise to the higher facts of the glorious gospel. But by and bye, we settle down in the full acceptance of these elements of the truth, and the mind seeks to climb the higher ascents, that is, if growth takes place.

We must take care to grow. Some do not grow. Paul speaks of these Hebrews as being shortcoming in this matter. He says,

“When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.”—(v. 12.)

If the apostolically instructed could get into this state, our own danger must be greater. It may be said the question of growth is out of our control. A man may say, “Well, if I grow, I shall be thankful, but if I do not, how can I help it? It is the blame of what I am, and I did not make myself.” Let us beware of the pleasurable fallacy. There is only so much of reasonableness in it. Though we did not make ourselves, being made, much depends upon what we do as to what we become. If a man pursue healthy habits, he will be healthy: whereas if he neglect the bath, fresh air, exercise and wholesome food, he will become a weak and incapable man. Any one can see this in physical things. The same law holds good in spiritual things. If a man work by right rules in spiritual things, he will grow; if by wrong rules, the opposite will be his experience.

The first condition of spiritual health is indicated by Peter in the words—

*“Desire the sincere milk of the word **that ye may grow thereby.**”*

A man addicting himself to companionship with the word, in the daily and systematic reading thereof, will “grow.” He will grow in himself and he will naturally cultivate the society of those of a similar taste, and receive the additional help that comes from wholesome association. As saith Solomon,

“He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.”

The growing tendency coming from such of course will be not only to seek identification with “*whatsoever things are lovely, and of good report,*” but to avoid everything of a contrary character, to stand not in the way of sinners, to lay aside of every weight, to cut off the right hand, to pluck out the right eye, to “*flee youthful lusts and to follow righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.*” What can be the effect of such a seeking the good and eschewing the evil, but that “*growth*” which is constantly exhorted in all the apostolic epistles? If, on the contrary, a man make but an indifferent pursuit of the spirit, and unwisely mix himself with worldly pleasures and carnal friends and dangerous companions, his experience of the want of growth will be the result of his own course, and justly chargeable, in so far as his course is a voluntary one, to his own fault.

But we are here this morning in the channel of growth. We are here desiring to obey the apostolic exhortation to grow in the knowledge of God, our Saviour, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot better realise this object than by attending to the particular command before us; to—

“Consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.”

Let us do so. Let us ponder what Paul proceeds to say of him:

“Who was faithful to him that appointed him; as also Moses was faithful in all his house.”

We all know what it is to be faithful: it is to carry out the wishes of another in fulness and truth. The testimony is that Jesus did this in relation to *“Him that appointed him.”* He did what the Father desired him to do, whether they were disagreeable or otherwise. Of what significance is the fact to us? Because of the application Jesus himself gave it.

*“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, **even as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in His love.**”*

The faithfulness of Christ as the basis of his acceptance with God is constantly placed before us as a lesson with reference to our own faithfulness as the basis of our acceptance with Christ. The words just quoted were spoken by Christ when on the earth. When he had gone away into heaven he repeated the lesson in the communication to John in Patmos, in this form:

“Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.”

*“**He** that overcometh and keepeth my works to the end, to him will I grant that he sit with me on my throne, **even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father on His throne.**”*

This forces home a lesson entirely lost of in the popular religious ministrations of the day. It is the lesson of all Paul’s epistles. It is the lesson of truth, as we shall find when we are face to face with the dread judgment seat before which we must all appear to give account and to receive according to the Judge’s estimate of our deserts. In a sense, we never can deserve anything, but in so far as He has been pleased to appoint that certain things will command His approbation, it is no presumption to hope, and to aim that we may be presented before Him *“with exceeding joy.”*

“This man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house.”

Here is something of profound meaning concerning *“the apostle and high priest of our profession.”* It is doubtless one of those things to which Peter makes reference when he says of Paul’s epistles:

“In them are things hard to be understood.”

Paul himself says of Christ:

*“Of whom we have many things to say and **hard to be uttered**, seeing ye are dull of hearing.”*

The expression reminds us of the remark of some of Christ’s disciples when they listened to some of the statements he had made:

“This is an hard saying; who can hear it?”

And they showed their sense of the hardness of it by the fact recorded:

“From that time, many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him.”—(John 6:66.)

Let us not be like them. Let us not be repelled by the hardness of a matter concerning Christ, ever remembering that those who suffer themselves so to be exercised only discard one hardness for another and a worse. The intellect is bound to be confronted by *“hardness”*—(or that which is difficult of understanding)—in one form or other. *“Nature”* itself, which some men think easy, is an inscrutable problem at the foundation. Men see it is a fact and mistake their familiarity with a fact for understanding. Christ is the fact and more glorious than nature, for he is the impersonation of intelligent love, and the link with all that is glorious in destiny.

“He who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house:”

How does this apply to Jesus as a reason why he should have more glory than Moses? Was not Yahweh the builder in both cases—by Moses and by Jesus? Truly; but there was a difference between Moses and Jesus:

“Moses, verily, was faithful in all his house as a servant; . . . but Christ as a son.”—
(v. 5 and 6.)

Christ being a son was more than Moses in many ways. He was a manifestation of the Father which Moses was not: he could say *“I and my Father are one,”* which Moses could not: he could say *“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,”* which Moses could in no wise affirm. He was *“the word made flesh,”* which Moses was not. All this involved his being the builder of the house, in the sense that *“He that built all things, is God”* (v. 4), and this man was God in manifestation, though a son, *“who learnt obedience through the things that he suffered.”*—(Heb. 5:8.) This brings with it a comfort concerning him which it is impossible to exhaust. When Israel saw Moses come out and go in among them, they saw but the servant and mouthpiece of the Terrible Majesty of the heavens—a man, one of themselves merely and only, though so highly honoured as to be spoken to by Yahweh, face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. Moses could tell them nothing but what he was authorised. He was merely an ambassador—strictly confined to his instructions. But when men saw Jesus, they stood in the presence of the Father mediately manifested. The Spirit, making him what he was as a man in the first instance, and abiding upon him without measure, after his baptism in the second place, made him what no man ever was before him—the personated exhibition and expression of the Father, everywhere present by his Spirit. So that the act of the one was the act of the other, as Jesus said:

“The son can do nothing himself but what he seeth the Father do.”

The practical significance of this is that the work of Christ was the work of God.

“God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.”

Consequently, we have not to think of the Father as a distant personage propitiated through the intervention of Christ. The Father approaches us through and in Christ. If Christ were among us, he would say to us as he said to Philip:

“Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works.”—(John 14:10.)

What was thus true of him in the days of his flesh is much more true of him in the exaltation that God hath given him. Paul’s testimony is that—

“In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”—(Col. 2:9.)

Paul himself saw the physical evidence of this in the light *“above the brightness of the sun”* which felled and blinded him on his way to Damascus. The fact is symbolically illustrated in the Apocalypse by *“the Lamb having seven horns and seven eyes”*—all power and all perfection—as saith Jesus:

“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth”— (Matt. 28:18); and—

“I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts.”—(Rev. 2:23.)

The description of him as *“the Lord the Spirit”* completes the evidence on this point.

His relation to us in this exalted position, is that of a priest. *“Let us consider him”* in this relation, as Paul exhorts. What does it mean? Paul leaves us no doubt on the subject. There is no room for the idea that he is priest in any figurative sense. Paul not only says—

“We have a great high priest, passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God;”

But he says—

“He ever liveth to make intercession for them that come unto God by him.”—(Heb. 7:25.)

Upon this fact he bases the injunction:

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain grace to help in time of need.”—(4:16.)

Here is an office actively exercised by Jesus, of the sort suggested by the statement that—

*“There is one God and one **Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.**”—(1 Tim. 2:5.)*

It is an asking of God for mercy on behalf of certain, as it is written in the Psalms:

“Thou hast ascended on high: thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.”—(68:18.)

At first sight, this idea might seem to clash with the other fact we have looked at, viz: that Jesus and the Father are a unity. It might be asked: if it be so that in the presence of Jesus, we are in the presence of the Father, and that we need not to think of the Father as a hostile personage in the background, where is there room for this making of intercession on behalf of offenders? The answer is that though Jesus and the Father are one, that oneness (which is a oneness of the sort subsisting between the sun and a sunbeam) does not exclude the quality of separateness by which the Father is Father, and the son, the son. The same Jesus who said *“I and my Father are one,”* also said—

*“It is written in your law, the testimony of **two** men is true. I am **one** that bear witness of myself, and the **Father who sent me** beareth witness of me.”—(John 8:17-18.)*

The Father was in heaven when Jesus was on earth, and Jesus lifted up his eyes **to heaven** and said:

“Father, the hour is come: glorify Thy son that Thy son may also glorify Thee.”

Afterwards, Jesus ascended to the Father, as he said:

*“And now I am no more in the world; but these (my disciples) are in the world, and **I come to Thee.**”—*

(John 17:11.)

But this departure of Jesus to the Father did not put an end to their personal separateness. It still remains the fact that while *“the head of every man is Christ, the **head of Christ is God**”* (1 Cor. 11:3); and while *“ye are Christ’s, **CHRIST is GOD’s.**”—(1 Cor. 3:23.)* Therefore, let us never lose hold of the fact that Christ is *“entered into heaven itself, now to **appear in the presence of God for us.**”—(Heb. 9:24.)* It is a fact to rejoice in and to be continually comforted by. We need not burden our minds with any conception of how this mediation is conducted. Whether Jesus speaks audibly to the Father in request for this one and that one, or whether, as is more probable, the request is conveyed by his unspoken wish, the result is the same to us, which is the important matter “for us poor mortal sinners.” That is, the Father is pleased for Christ’s sake, if Christ choose to make request, to forgive such as may be asked for. There is, therefore, much practical reality of meaning in John’s statement,

“If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”—(1 John 2:1-2.)

We stand in need of this consolation, for we must all experience Paul’s dissatisfaction with himself, when he said:

“The good that I would I do not, and the evil which I would not that I do;”—

Not that this means living in sin, but it means that there are heights of holiness and praise and well-doing to which the new man groaningly aspires; but to which he cannot attain in this state of humiliation; and that there are also necessities and infirmities of various sorts, from which this same new man would gladly be emancipated, but to which he is obliged to submit with the feeling of Paul, which led him to exclaim:

“Oh, wretched man that I am!”

It is a comfort to know that if we walk in love and obedience, with broken and contrite heart, trembling at the word, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity.

This idea joins hands with what Paul intimates in the chapter we are considering, viz., that our possession of these privileges depends upon a certain mental state in relation to the hope.

*“Whose house are we if **we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.**”*—(Heb. 3:6.)

Nothing more completely disposes of the popular idea, fostered by the leaders of the people, that the nature of our “theological expectations,” as they would term them, is a matter of indifference. The holding of “*the hope*” is essential to our acceptance with God: for “*we are saved by hope*,” or by the hope, as it is in the original. —(Rom. 8:21.) This hope is “*the hope of Israel*,” as Paul told the Jews in Rome. —(Acts 28:20.) It is a hope embracing many glorious elements, —the hope of eternal life, the hope of resurrection, the hope of change to the immortal, the hope of the coming of the kingdom, that is, of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:1); the hope of a place in it, the hope of the blessedness covenanted to all nations of the earth in Abraham, in the day when Abraham himself shall “*receive the promise*,” which he did not receive in the day of his pilgrimage, but which he saw afar off with the result of confessing he was a stranger and pilgrim upon the earth.—(Heb. 11:13.) If a man be destitute of this hope, he is destitute of that which is well-pleasing to God: or if possessing it without “*confidence and rejoicing*,” he is equally wanting of the condition which Paul says is necessary to constituency in the house of Christ.

Let us therefore listen to Paul, when he says further on in the chapter.

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, but exhort one another daily while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”—(v. 12.)

We are in constant danger while we are in the present evil world. Many things tend to dim the brightness of the hope in our minds. Let us take the precautions appointed for our help. Let us “*give ourselves to reading*” (1 Tim. 4:13), pray without ceasing, and forsake not the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is. In this way, we may hope, with the help we shall receive from within the veil, to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, and to receive at last that joyful welcome into rest and glory which awaits all the children of God, in the day of the Lord’s promised return to the earth.

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