

A LIFE THAT PLEASED GOD

It must have struck us all, some time or other, how feebly men are moved by the idea of pleasing Christ—even some men professing the Truth. Some matter of life or course of conduct is in dispute, you suggest, perhaps, that such and such a course will be well-pleasing to God, or in harmony with the will of Christ. How flat the suggestion seems to fall. It evokes no response and stirs no feeling. Very likely your words will be received with ill-concealed disgust or contempt, as if you were appealing to a chimera. Brethren, there is drawing near a time when what Christ thinks will be a matter of supreme anxiety to everyone, a thing of great weight and urgent practical moment. Our Bible readings and meetings are preparing us for that moment. Their joint effect is to bring us under the power of things that are not seen but actual.

We stand related to many invisible things that are very real. What more actual and essential than the air we breathe? What more invisible? What more invisible than the life we live, the thoughts we think, the feelings we have; take these away, what reality would be left for us? People can see the force of the thought in these cases. Why should they be insensible to it in other things, as much out of sight for the time being, but more real in their bearing upon present and future well being? Christ is out of sight, God is out of sight; the things that have happened are all out of sight except in so far as they left traces. The things that belong to the future are *“not seen as yet.”* But their reality is a prevailing fact with intelligence. It is only ignorance or forgetfulness that are insensible to their power. Ignorance and forgetfulness are vulgar qualities. They belong to a state of low development. This is the state of the world at large around us. They are uninfluenced by the invisible things of the Truth because their feeble mentalities are overpowered by the impressions of the passing hour. The greatest facts to which they stand related are hidden from sight by the images of the proximate ephemerality.

We are all liable to be the victims of this deception. It is a struggle between the impressions of sense and the discernments of wisdom. When the latter get the upper hand we obtain the victory of faith which overcomes the world. There is nothing mysterious about the faith or its victory. It is a *“faith that comes by hearing the Word of the Lord,”* as Paul defines in Rom. 4:17, a confidence in the things testified by it. This Word of the Lord is extraneous to ourselves. It has been spoken to us by the men in past times whom God employed as the vehicle of its utterance. It has been preserved for us in writing by the same wisdom and kindness that originated its giving in the first instance. The practical result is the Bible which we read at all our meetings, and much oftener when there are no meetings. By its means we get into contact with many invisible things that are very powerful to bless us. The invisible God and the invisible future are brought near us in the invisible occurrences of the past of which we read.

David is invisible for the time being. As Paul has it,

“Having served his own generation, he fell asleep and saw corruption.”

As Peter said,

“He is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us to this day.”

But in our reading we see him as he was in the busy days he lived when he *“served his own generation,”* and we get something worthy of study, because it is the spectacle of a life that pleased God, which we cannot always be sure of when we look upon modern ways and models in a godless age like this. What do we find him busy in? Busy with the things pertaining to God. He had risen from a very humble station to the position of king. He had triumphed over all his difficulties and all his enemies. He found himself securely seated on the throne of Israel, and in a position of great personal comfort and exaltation. What does he exercise himself with? Not with hunting, not with schemes of further personal aggrandisement, but with the promotion of the honour of God and the development of the divine service. He bethinks himself that the Ark of God which had been in exile in the country of the Philistines, and had only just returned after a twenty years' absence, was hid away under curtains, while he dwelt in a cedar palace. He contemplates great things to remedy this inequality. He will build a house for God. Pondering his idea, he receives a message to forbid his purpose:

“Thou shalt not build an house for Me.”

It was not fitting in a typical system of things that a man of much bloodshed should provide a permanent resting place for the Holy Name and Presence, but it was acceptable that his thoughts should be running in that direction.

"Thou didst well that it was in thine heart."

It would be the work of a typical son—a man of peace and promise:

"He shall build an house for my name . . . Furthermore I tell thee, I will build thee an house. Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations."

David is overpowered with the magnificence of the prospect opened before him in the covenant.

"Who am I, O Lord, and what is my father's house? Thou hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree. Thou hast promised this goodness to Thy servant. Now, therefore, let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant, that it may be before Thee for ever, for (whom) Thou blessest, O Lord, shall be blessed forever."

Out of this covenant springs Christ, whom we remember by the emblems on the table. We rest on no plausible opinion in holding this view. It is the interpretation of God's own spirit by the mouth of Peter,

"God hath sworn with an oath to David that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne."

God had not forgotten the oath of the covenant 1,000 years after it had been given, for at the end of that time and over, He sent Gabriel to Nazareth to Mary, David's descendant, to announce to her that the time had come for the promised son.

"And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

And He has not forgotten it now, more than 1,800 years further on. This same Jesus, the born son of David and Son of God (transcendent combination) remains in the heavens only *"until the times of restitution spoken of by the prophets."* These times are now nigh at hand, and we shall soon see the practical reality of those *"sure mercies of David,"* which God has offered to every heedful son of Adam, and which have come within our range in the hearing of the Word. Christ in the earth again is Christ here to build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen down, and to give David himself that abiding place with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets of which he spoke when on earth. All the world will then see what intelligence may now easily become persuaded of, that *"we have not followed cunningly devised fables"* in having placed our trust in the refuge set before us in the gospel.

David having received this crowning mercy of the throne-covenant in recognition of his faithful solicitude in the affairs of God, did not sink supinely in the delicious lethargy which it might have produced in some men. He busied himself more actively than he even appears to have done previously in the matters connected with the divine service and honour. He pitched a tent for the ark in Jerusalem, and organised an extensive and regular service of the priests, and set himself to collect a vast store of materials for the building of the temple which he understood Solomon, the man of peace, was to build. In this David is an illustration to us of what Paul means when he not only recommends them to be *"steadfast and unmoveable"* but to be *"always abounding in the work of the Lord."* Not that we can make opulent arrangement for the public honour of God as David was able to do: but we can *"always abound"* in the measure of what is possible to us. There are some who are full of steady and ingenious enterprise for the Truth's service in all its departments, and there are some that pour cold water on this class of activity. It is not difficult to decide to which of the two classes David's case belongs. David's true brethren will want to emulate David's spirit. If we cannot render an official and resplendent service, there is all the greater reason why we should do what we can. The very smallness and poverty of our day is a reason for turning what opportunity we have to the very best account. Men are very energetic and capable in the promotion of temporal enterprises, and, when successful, receive all sorts of encomiums for their talent, their public spirit, etc. Why should the sons of God be behind the children of this world in the doing of the work that belongs to them? David was not behind contemporary kings in personal capacity or "go;" he was much before them. And we may all feel that it is permitted to the children of light to go as far as they can in the much higher line of things to which they stand related.

"They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible."

It is all a question of faith. When a man's faith is robust, his devisings and doings are not lagging or feeble. It is feeble or uncertain faith that weakens the hands and kills the work. The public weather at present is not good for faith. There are all sorts of winds and chills, and all sorts of "microbes" that infest the air and diffuse spiritual debility and death. It is useful to be on our guard and to take precautions and make a liberal use of disinfectants. Abstain from debilitating beverages. Tone up your spiritual nerves with the tonics and antidotes that the Bible furnishes, and which history, the Truth and wisdom in general will more or less contribute. Do not herd with the fools of our generation. The reading of frivolous literature is baneful, indulgence in various polluting pleasures, provided for the polluted public, is killing to the spiritual man. Friendly association with those who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the sure way to fail in the endeavour to walk as the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of Yahweh and in His law doth he meditate day and night."

"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall be destroyed."

It is best to *"come out from among them and be separate."* It is best either to let the Gospel of Christ alone altogether, or to throw our utmost zeal and heartiness into its service. The high calling is too stupendous a thing to be handled in any middle way. The hope of the gospel is the best thing under the sun within the range of mortal attainment, and it ought to have the best and heartiest service it is in the power of mortal man to render. This will be all very apparent when the spell of present illusions is broken, and the world stands nakedly in the presence of the judgment of God at the appearing of His Son.

There is a beautiful analogy in the particular transactions in which David appears before us in the portion read from 1st Chronicles.

"When David had made an end of offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of Yahweh; and he dealt to everyone of Israel both man and woman, to every one a loaf of bread and a good piece of flesh and a flagon of wine" (16:2-3).

Regarding David as the type of Christ we may trace in this transaction the outline of the coming development of things in those *"ages to come"* of which Paul in Ephesians speaks as the ages in which God will show us the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus. It will be when David's Son makes an end of the priestwork in which he is engaged that he will bless all the people in the name of Yahweh, and he will then deal to every one a bounteous portion of the fat things to which the Eternal Spirit in the prophets invites the perishing sons of men (Isa. 55:2).

And what is the sequel? Even that which is typified in the next recorded act of David's (v.4):

"He appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of Yahweh and to record and to thank and praise Yahweh, God of Israel."

When Christ has taken sin and death from the world, he will organise the life of earth's inhabitants on the basis of praise to the Lord God of Israel. This is represented in the vision of the Kingdom seen by John in Patmos, wherein the four living ones (heraldically significative of the whole commonwealth of Israel),

"Rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty which was, and is, and is to come . . . Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things: and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:8-11).

Such a prospect has no attraction for the mere children of the flesh.

It is a mode of self-test to ask ourselves how far the prospect of an endless life devoted to the celebration of God's praise appeals to our sense of pleasure. In a state of fully-developed and enlightened reason, the prospect is a ravishing one, of being clothed with power, and endowed with capacity to open out our faculties in the lucid contemplation of rapturous and sustained admiration of the inherent and supernal excellence of eternal wisdom and power. No privilege or joy of created existence can in the nature of things come near to this—none so purely sweet, none so lasting and inexhaustible. The delights of human friendship are great, the pleasure of personal gratification is something, but who shall measure the joy of reciprocal communion with the Eternal Father,

"Of Whom and through Whom and to Whom are all things?"

It is written,

"In Thy presence is fulness of joy;" and, again,

"Strength and gladness are in His place."

To be linked in unity with Him must be a noble ecstasy, burning with the steadiness of eternal glory, with an intensity that does not diminish its power, and a gladness that does not interfere with its dignified and perfect symmetry. *"To drink of the rivers of Thy pleasures"* must of necessity be the highest possible joy, and a joy that does not pall or exhaust itself because fed by the inexhaustible supply of the Spirit.

"On that day," therefore, we may recognise a special significance in—

"David having delivered this Psalm . . . to thank Yahweh; give thanks unto Yahweh; call on His name; make known His deeds among the people. Sing unto Him, sing psalms unto Him, talk ye of all His wondrous works. Glory ye in His holy name. Let the heart of them rejoice that seek Yahweh . . . Blessed be Yahweh God of Israel for ever and ever."

This attitude of the mind to God is the essence of the whole system of the Truth. The severe lesson of Eden enforced it; the Law of Moses enunciated and illustrated it; the Law of Christ recommends and inculcates it in every word that came from the mouth of Jesus. The mission of the Truth in all its applications is to bring us to it. The Truth is a lifeless skeleton apart from it. How unwise to jeopardise it by conforming to the ways of folly around us which are to perish. How prudent and expedient to depart from iniquity and to cultivate *"holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord,"* as commanded—*"following righteousness, faith, charity and peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."*

That this course involves self-denial, even to the extent of self-mortification and self-crucifixion, is not to be contradicted. But there is another side. This is but a sowing time—soon gone, though leaving the seed of permanent results. After the sowing comes the reaping.

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

"He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

This is no mere sentiment, but a matter of fact. It is esteemed sentimentality now only by those whose eyes are blinded by the visible ephemerality. The day of harvest will show things as they actually are.

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

It will not be always a matter of talk and hope. It will be such only so long as that phase is needful to prepare us for what is coming. It is limited to the days of our probation. These are few, and will soon be over, and when once gone, we will have the unspeakable satisfaction of thinking they will never come back, and of discovering at the last that they will have been instrumental in working out for us an upshot of glory unspeakable.

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