

BIBLE THINGS ARE TRUE

At this Table of the Lord, we stand between the old and the new, and curiously blend both in our present experience. We have “*put off the old man with his deeds*” in the sense of having broken bread with the lead and guidance of the nature in which we were born: yet that nature is still with us and gives us a good deal of trouble at times with its revolts and oppositions to divine injunction, causing us to groan with Paul at the wretchedness, which Paul experienced from the same cause. Disowning the old man as but an ephemeral prelude to the perfect state, we have “*put on the new man*,” yet we know the new man only as a state of mental renewal; not as an endowment of that strength and real sweetness that will come with the new nature which is the new man’s final development.

We stand between the old and the new—leaving the one—reaching forward to the other. In this, we are dealing with facts—not with fancies. Tennyson speaks of “ringing out the old, and ringing in the new; ringing out the false, and ringing in the true.” But in his mouth, it is but a pretty saying. There is no power of changing the old into the new except with God, who has revealed His method in Christ. Bells may ring and poets may write to all eternity without inducing the least change from one to the other. In the visions of Patmos,

“*He that sat upon the throne, said, Behold I make all things new*” (Rev. 21:5).

This was after—

“*A great voice out of heaven had said, There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.*”

This shows the sense in which God will make all things new.

Here is something to trust to: “*He that sat on the throne*” is careful to emphasise this. He immediately adds,

“*Write, for those words are true and faithful.*”

This is the pith of the whole matter. There are in the world many beautiful thoughts, it may be; beautiful sayings; but what if they are not true? What if they are beautiful dreams? What profit in the beauty in that case? The words of God may be sometimes uncouth in the ear of the fastidious verbal refinement, but here is their terrible, their glorious quality; they are true. They cannot fail. Of this God has given us many pledges. Let us seize them and realise them as they come before us.

Take the prophecy before us in Ezekiel 25-28. It concerns Tyre, which as every person of knowledge is well aware, was the Britain of the ancient world—the centre of all maritime traffic: the meeting-place and emporium of all the trade done by sea and of a great part of what was done on land, for all countries. We get a very good idea of the extent and variety and importance of her commerce from chapter 27; and the Greek writers who accompanied Alexander in his wars against the Persian Empire have left us a very full description of the architectural glory and military strength of the place, which was an island close to the shore of northern Palestine till Alexander joined it to the shore by an immense mole constructed during his memorable siege. In the days when Ezekiel wrote this prophecy,

Tyre, like Babylon, was in the zenith of her prosperity, for he wrote at the beginning of Judah's captivity by Nebuchadnezzar "*among the captives by the river of Chebar*" (Ezek. 1:1). Tyre, with her extensive shipping, was queen of the sea and nurse of all nations. She enriched the kings of the earth with the multitude of her merchandise (Ch. 27:33). She had a very high position in her own estimation and in the estimation of all who had dealings with her. She said, "*I am of perfect beauty.*" Her builders had perfected her beauty. Her shipboards were of the best timber—cedar of Lebanon; her oars, of the oaks of Bashan; her benches of ivory; her sails of the finest material that could be manufactured—fine linen with brodered work from Egypt, blue and purple from the isles of Elishah. The mariners sang of her: they could not find language to describe her glory:

"What city is like Tyrus?" (Ch. 27:3-7, 25, 32).

Well, what does the prophecy say? That God is against her, and that she will be brought to ruin:

"Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus: I will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth her waves to come up. And they shall destroy the walls of Tyrus and break down her towers. I will also scrape her dust from her and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the seas; for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God" (Ch. 26:3-5).

How has this prophecy worked out? The fact is notorious to all who make history their study and not romance; who choose truth and not fiction for their mental pabulum; who prefer knowledge and understanding to the gapes and fripperies of light literature. The prophecy has been fulfilled to the letter. You may go to the sea coast of Palestine by one of the Cook's excursions and you will search in vain for Tyre. You will of course find the geographical spot where she stood. You will find the sea-washed island about 40 miles to the north of Haifa, where the range of Carmel ends in a promontory. The shape of land and sea is the same as when Tyre boasted and Ezekiel wrote. But the busy harbour, crowded shipping, the stately towers, the sumptuous mansions, the villas and castles of the rich stretching away right and left on the main land, the thronging prosperous populace everywhere—you look for them in vain. It is so written in the chapter we have read:

"Thou shalt be no more: though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord God" (Ch. 26:21).

You cannot even find her architectural relics, except in the water round the island, according to the account of travellers, as it had been written:

"They shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water."

Looking down into the depths on a clear day, it is said you can see broken columns and masses of stone work. All is a silent desolation where once were busy sounds of human industry and mirth, as it had been written:

"I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard" (Ch. 26:13).

But on the island itself we see something. There is a small fishing settlement. What is that which, by the eyes of travellers, we see drying and bleaching on the rocks? Fishermen's nets. What is this which we read in the chapters before us?

"I will scrape her dust from her and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea" (v. 4-5).

What shall we say? That the Word of God is true and cannot be broken. This prophecy has been fulfilled to the very letter; and man cannot prophesy. Tyre came to ruin, not by natural decay; not by the uprise of a commercial rival on another spot drawing away her business from her; but in the very way foretold:

"I will cause many nations to come up against her, as the sea causeth her waves to come up."

First under Nebuchadnezzar, and then under Alexander, nearly 250 years after Nebuchadnezzar, imperial nations (comprising many nationalities) subjected Tyre to the most destructive of sieges, and brought her into the ruin foretold.

It is not as if this were the only case of Bible prophecy fulfilled. There is scarcely an end to such cases. The Bible is full of prophecy to a much greater extent than the common run of people imagine, and all its prophecies have been fulfilled. There is not an exception. Look at the great mountain outlines of the subject. Look at scattered Israel; look at desolate Palestine; look at overthrown and obliterated Babylon; look at degraded Egypt. Look at the four great empires that have successively ruled the world; look at the terrible Papacy that rose out of the fourth of these empires, wielding the most odious tyranny over the consciences and liberties of men that could be imagined, but which was plainly foretold, and losing it exactly at the end of the allotted time (1260 years). Look at the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ—all foreshown in the prophets many centuries before their occurrence. What verdict of reason can there be but one—that God is in this Book, and that the prophets spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit?

Of what stupendous import is this verdict when we consider that two-thirds (roughly speaking) of the prophecy outlined in the Bible relates to a future as yet ahead of us, and a future so glorious?

"In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never perish . . . it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

"At that time, I shall build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen."

"I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen whither they be gone, and gather them on every side and bring them into their own land, and one King shall be king to them all"—even "the branch of David, whom I will raise up unto them—a king who shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land, before whom all kings shall bow down, and all nations serve him: under whom the nations shall turn to God, saying, let us go up; He will teach us of His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. In Him men shall be blessed, and all nations shall call Him blessed. They shall beat their swords into ploughshares; they shall study war no more. Princes shall rule among them and guide them unto all righteousness and truth, and they shall all know the

Lord; and there shall be peace on earth and goodwill among men. The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever."

The saints of God, redeemed out of every nation, and out of much tribulation, and made immortal in nature, will reign in Christ among the nations, and the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

These are not poetic imaginations, but the authentic disclosure and enunciation of the divine purpose. It is not the thought of man, but the Word of God. It is therefore something for us to lean on with comfort and hope and the joy of sunlit anticipation—something by which also we are purified in the life we now live, for as John says,

"He that hath this hope purifieth himself."

It is inevitable. A man with such convictions and such prospects before his mind will naturally conform to the standard of things associated with them. If ever we falter and drift again in the direction of the pollutions of the world, from which the Truth has delivered us, it is when the power of conviction grows weak. Full assurance of faith is at the bottom of all effectual enterprise, even in this world's affairs; unbelief at the bottom of all failure. Well-grounded faith and hope will bear a man up in the darkest and most difficult circumstances. Hence the importance of nourishing faith. Faith will enable us to overcome, as John says, and we know what God says,

"He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son." (Rev. 21:7).

Some ask, What is this overcoming? A moment's thought will show them the answer. Overcoming is getting the upper hand of an opposing force of some kind. The opposing force we have to contend against is the fleshly mind, or mind natural to man, either in ourselves or others. Paul defines it,

"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit (that is, against the Spirit of God, as active towards us, through apostles and prophets, in doctrine, precept and command), and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that we cannot do the things that we would."

Here are two opposing forces in those who have become enlightened in the things of the Spirit. Our problematic relation to them is clearly defined in Romans 8:13,

"If ye walk after the flesh ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

Here is the fight; the flesh in a thousand ways says, "Follow me," and the Spirit also, in manifold ways, says, "Follow me." The one goes east, the other goes west. We cannot follow both at the same time.

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

The overcoming lies in making a successful choice and holding to it—casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

There is every incentive to overcome. *“Godliness is profitable for the life that now is as well as that which is to come,”* for a man who suffers himself to be guided by the precepts of the Spirit of God is happier and nobler and better in every way than the man who obeys the promptings of the lower instincts. Sin will blight and ruin a man even now; righteousness will confer a crown of glory upon a man even now. Righteousness exalteth a nation—let alone a man.

“Great peace have they that love Thy law; nothing shall them offend.”

There is more joy in the exercise of the understanding and of the higher faculties than can ever be found in the pursuit of mere secular aims of life. The service of God, the love of God, the opening out of the mind in the daily contemplation of God in prayer and reading, open out sources of peace and joy unknown to the man who knows not God and obeys not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But the chief incentive relates to prospect.

“Ho every one that thirsteth, come to the waters . . . come to me. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. Hear and your soul shall live. I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.”

“Come out from among them (the unheedingful) and be ye separate, and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters.”

“To you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his beams.”

With such relations and prospects, there is no darkness on the horizon. There is nothing but brightness and joy ahead. Even the present darkness is illuminated by the glory of joyful hope. Even in distress and infirmities, like Paul, we are enabled in a measure to take pleasure, knowing that they work out for us a state of preparedness for the unspeakable goodness which God has in reserve for those who love Him. We are able to think and say with him:

“The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

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