

THE LESSONS OF THE GENEALOGIES

This morning, we had read in our hearing the chapter from Luke containing the genealogy of Christ. It does not appear as if we could get much that was profitable or interesting from that long list of names. It appears a dry and useless category altogether; but we sometimes find things different from what they appear. It may be so in this case. Consider, first, that these names represent persons that lived in an unbroken line from Adam to Christ. How wonderfully interesting is the numeration, from this point of view alone. There is nothing like it in the whole range of human literature. In ordinary cases, a line of generation is soon lost from memory or record. It is considered a notable and a dignified thing for even an aristocratic family to be able to carry its pedigree back to the time of William the Norman. The mass of mankind know nothing of their great-grandfathers. But here is an unbroken and attested line of ancestry bridging a gulf of four thousand years—a marvel that few people appreciate, because one with which all people are familiar—like the sun, the greatest and most astounding phenomenon in human experience, and yet the least noticed because so well known.

Then consider that this list of names represents a succession of persons who, in their day, lived as really as we may now feel ourselves to do. There may not seem to be much in this, but the power of it will be beneficially felt where it is distinctly realised; for does it not enable us to feel that we, also, are on the march—that our days upon earth are as a shadow—that there is nothing abiding? We have to school ourselves into the recognition of this manifest fact. It is a fact we do not easily realise at any stage of life; at all stages, life seems real, and the ending of it somewhat legendary. In youth, age seems a long way off, and death an old fogey calculation. In young manhood or womanhood, life is full of earnest vigour and pleasing possibilities, which fresh and lively powers set themselves to realise, without much thought of the ultimate drift. At maturity, anxieties have taken the place of hope, and equally shut out the future, as they engross the present. In old age, susceptibility deadens, and desire fails, and the face turns backwards rather than forwards. At every stage, it requires an effort of the mind rightly to estimate life as a fleeting scene soon to disappear, with all its joys or burdens, as the case may be. The success of this effort marks the difference between wisdom and folly. Whatever helps us in it, helps us to be wise and good. A man who has once fairly mastered and accepted the fact that the life we now live is a short-lived affair, is much more likely to be dutiful towards God, and kind and patient with all men, than the man whose mind turns only on present matters. We look at the long line of men, whose pictures are preserved to us in the genealogy. We see them one by one pass from the cradle to the grave. We look at ourselves: we see that we are somewhere between these two points, and that it is only a question of a little while for us, also, to reach the end of all living. Speaking, now, of the natural order of things, we also must by and by pass in this natural order into the silent record of the past, for good or evil, as we now live. The effect of such a recognition of truth must be felt by every one; it inclines us to look at life in a serious way, and to enquire which is the best way to spend it. There is but one answer of wisdom to this enquiry. Fear God; hope in his mercy; do his commandments. Patiently continue in this, the only line of true well-doing, to the end, and thou shalt see in the end of it light and gladness, strength and wisdom, glory, honour, and immortality. So much we may deduce from the array of names which connect Adam and Christ.

But there is another line of contemplation opened out to us in the genealogy: why is the genealogy given at all? Here is a line with Adam at one end and Christ at the other. What can be the object of such a line, except to show that Christ belongs to it? Why the care to show an unbroken pedigree from Adam, if Christ be not of that pedigree? Ah, but he is of that pedigree. He is introduced to us in the very first verse of the New Testament as "*Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*" True, he is of another extraction as well. He is the begotten of God, the son of the Eternal Father by the Spirit overshadowing his virgin-mother, Mary; but one line of extraction does not destroy another. They both meet and blend in the glorious man Christ Jesus—"the Son of God and the Son of Man." The truth has enabled us to comprehend the necessity for the Adamic extraction of the Lord Jesus; and we have set our faces against all who would, with speeches however fair and plausible, obliterate that extraction. In him, that which was wrong with the Adamic race was to be put right as a nucleus or starting point for a new development. The accomplishment of this work required that he should be as much a son of Adam as those whom he was brought into the world to save. His

work was to “*abolish death*.” This he has done (2 Tim. 1:10); he has done it by death and resurrection (Heb. 2:14; 1 Cor. 15:21). But how could he have done this except as a son of Adam in subjection to death? for as yet he has abolished death in no one but himself.

“*Death hath no more dominion over him*” (Rom. 6:9).

But it has dominion as yet over the rest of mankind. The victory has been accomplished by his obedience (Rom. 5:19); and he will share the results of his victory with all his brethren in due time; for God hath given him power over all flesh with this view (John 17:2; 5:21-29).

God’s great and holy ways required such a mode of redemption, and, therefore, such a son as one who should be at one and the same time Son of Adam and Son of God. Had God not been holy, he might have dispensed with a plan of redemption altogether, and reprieved the erring sons of Adam in the simple exercise of his prerogative of mercy. Had he not been great and just he might have accepted the death of a substitute who was in no way involved in the matter at issue; and allowed the whole race to go free in consideration of the payment of their debts by another. But it is not so. In his forbearance, he proposes forgiveness (Rom. 3:25), but not unconditional. There must be a declaration of his own righteousness in the whole case, in the shedding of the blood of one whose blood-shedding shall be a declaration of righteousness by reason of his participation of the nature under condemnation, and whom, at the same time, he can accept and raise from the dead on account of his perfect obedience. Such a one, in Christ, he hath set forth to be a propitiation—a meeting-point of peace and reconciliation, through faith in his blood (Rom. 3:25). He is thus just, and yet the justifier of every one coming to him in this faith. Christ’s death was just; Christ’s resurrection was just; and for Christ’s sake, he forgives everyone who lays hold of his blood-shedding—in being ceremonially buried in his grave—in being baptised into his death (Rom. 6:4). There is no other way of approach to the Father, unto life eternal. There is none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved.

All this is involved in the genealogical line that connects Christ and Adam. Adam brought death into the line, and, from the line Christ removes it, first in himself, and then in all whom he is pleased to accept in the administration of the judgment which God hath placed in his hand. For these, Christ makes request in his capacity of priest over his own house; and God grants his request for the sake of Christ’s own submission to the Father’s mighty will in all things.

There is another theme of reflection in the fact that the line does not go beyond Christ. Beginning with Adam, it ends with Christ. There has been no preservation of a genealogical line since his day. Human generation has, since that time, become fused into a common mass, in which no man could trace his pedigree. There must be a meaning in this, as there is in all the works of God. It is not difficult to see a meaning. We see it if we go forward far enough. Go to the end of the thousand years. Go to the time when there is no more curse, no more pain, and no more death. Whose name is the “*one name*” in all the earth? Whose name covers all men—symbolically engraved on every forehead? At whose name does every knee bend and every tongue confess? THE NAME OF JESUS. The population then filling the earth is all in Christ, just as the present population is all in Adam. The race of Adam will have disappeared, except in so far as absorbed and preserved in Christ. Hence there was no need for the preservation of Adam’s pedigree after Christ, for all natural pedigree after him is effaced in him; that is to say, it counts for nothing outside of him, and inside of him it is absorbed.

A subordinate, yet important, element in the genealogy relates to David. In the wisdom of God, David’s house is chosen as the royal institution of the whole earth for ever. God’s covenant with him, which David, as he drew near to the grave, said was “*all his salvation and all his desire*,” had relation to a son whom God should give him, and who should occupy his throne for ever—whose advent upon the scene should be as the light of an unclouded dawn (2 Sam. 7:12-16; 23:4-5; Psa. 89:34-36; Acts 2:29). This son was Jesus, as everyone knows who is in the least acquainted with the truth. Now it was important that the line of descent from David should be preserved till the promised son should appear; otherwise a cloud would—in the eyes of men—have lain upon the greatest of the works of God, for how should it have been manifest to men that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the house of David, if the line of descent had been lost or become involved in obscurity? It is a proof of the Messiahship of Jesus, coordinate with many infallible proofs, that the genealogy of the house of David ceased to be preserved after his appearance. But there was no need for its preservation after his appearance on any ground, for as the natural heir to David’s throne, revived from the dead, and made to live for ever, his existence must always override subsequent genealogy, even if it had been

preserved; for who could hope to take the throne with a legal heir ever living? Thus do all the works and ways of God harmonise one with another in all their details.

It remains for us to consider our relation to this glorious one, this child born, this son given, whose name is rightly called—

“Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”

From the position we occupy, we profitably look to him in two ways—as he was, and as he is. The position we occupy is one of trial and self-denial in many ways for his name’s sake; and we have need of patience and need of comfort. We get much of both when we look at him as he was. For what do we see? A man despised and hated and dishonoured—a man who stood aloof from the world for his Father’s sake—a man who was considered fanatical and worse—mad, demonised, and vulgarly reputed to be under the control of the mythical deity of the Philistines—a man who was poor and without the friendship of the wealthy, and who was finally hounded to death—who came to his end under the most ignominious and heart-withering circumstances possible to human experience. It is difficult for us in the calmness of personal security to realise the overwhelming agony of the closing scene of the Lord’s life on the earth; cast out, spurned, condemned with the uttermost human hate, and given over to the unbridled sport and brutality of a ruffian Roman soldiery. We catch glimpses of the utter desolation of the bitter hour in the words of the Spirit in the 22nd Psalm, where the sufferings of Christ are portrayed in the form of Christ’s personal lament—

“My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me . . . ? All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him . . . Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.”

It may be asked what comfort can we have in the contemplation of this dark picture? The answer will spring from the heart of every man who has known what trouble is, particularly trouble that has come in the way of righteousness. In time of trouble the heart is liable to be overwhelmed; and is it not at such a time a real comfort to look back and see that the most beloved of all the sons of God was deepest in the pit of affliction? Is it not comforting to hear the words of Christ:

“The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord”? (Matt. 10:24).

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you . . . If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you because they know not him that sent me” (John 15:18-21).

It only requires the mind to open to these considerations to be enabled to draw from them the most powerful support. If Christ, who was without sin, passed a life of obscurity and unpopularity, ending in the direst calamity, what reasonable ground for complaint or misgiving have we who are blemished with so many shortcomings, if we should have to come through the sharp experience of adversity *“for our profit,”* that we might be partakers of his holiness? So far from ground of complaint, the case stands the other way; there is ground for thankfulness if we come in for a share of that chastisement whereof all the sons of God are partakers.

“Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth.”

This is revealed truth; we cannot get away from it; we shall find it true. Therefore let us prepare to accept it, comforted, however, by the other truths, that the Father pitieth His children, and that He will not put more upon us than we are able to bear—for this also is revealed—but after we have suffered sufficiently for His purpose, will He establish, and strengthen, and settle us.

If we derive comfort from the contemplation of Christ in the past, how unspeakably greater is the comfort we may find in the consideration of what he is and what he will be. ALL POWER is in His hands (Matt. 28:18). —God hath given him—

“To be head over all things to the ecclesia, which is his body” (Eph. 1:22-23). —
God hath exalted him to the glory of His own eternal nature—

“Angels, authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1 Pet. 3:22).

Is there not a mighty comfort in having thus a friend at the Highest Court? For consider: his present exaltation has reference, among other glorious things, to the requirements of his brethren. He is their priest and mediator.

“He ever liveth to make intercession for them” according to the will of God (Heb. 7:25).

He is touched with the feeling of their infirmity; and having suffered like them—being tempted—he is able also to succour them that are tempted (Heb. 4:15; 2:18). All this means an invisible care-taking and guidance in this present darkness, which must be a source of comfort and confidence to every one whose heart opens in faith to the attested and demonstrated fact.

But if the present friendship of the risen and glorified Christ be a comfort, what words shall tell the consolation afforded by the realisation of the fact that he is coming, and that when he comes, he will deliver us from this present evil world, and bruise its whole diabolism under our feet? It is only the weakness of human faculty that ever dims this glorious prospect. The facts are all there, whether we apprehend them or not. They are outside of us; they are independent of us; they remain true even if we should faint and fail utterly. The sun shines in the sky even if a man shut up in a dungeon cannot see it and cannot realise it. We are all more or less imprisoned. Darkness covers the earth. We walk by faith and not by sight; and because we are weak in ourselves, we may falter and grow weary, faith failing to see at all times clearly the things that are promised, and that are pledged, and that are coming. But the sun shines nevertheless. God remains from everlasting to everlasting; His purpose cannot fail; His word cannot be broken; no tarrying can alter it; no decay of man or failure of human enterprise or perishing of human hopes can affect the root and foundation of the hope that is in Christ. Yahweh’s covenant stands fast; it is established in the heavens. At the appointed time the wondrous sequel of Christ’s past work on earth will become a fact. Attended by an august and imposing retinue of the angels, he will arrive on the earth at the spot chosen for the purpose; the dust of his dead will respond to the formative energy of his power, come to awakening form and life again, and come forth; the hearts of his living disciples will thrill with fearful gladness at the intimation sent abroad; in their mustering multitudes the living and the (in times past) dead will come to his presence; the judgment will sit; the dread secrets of the divine remembrance will be disclosed, and to all will be meted out reward according to their works. Oh, then the gladness of the chosen, who stand victorious on the rock of life eternal, after the toilsome and tearful journey of “Time’s dark wilderness of years”; and, oh, the unavailing terror of the rejected multitude who depart with reprobation from the presence of the most glorious Son of God, filling the air for a moment with weeping and gnashing of teeth! When we ask to which of the companies we desire to belong, there is but one answer from the heart of all men. And there is but one way to realise the wish of the answer in the great day of account, and that way you know: the way of faith; the way of obedience; the way of patient continuance in well-doing, holding fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope steadfast to the end.

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