

# Gospel of John-F.B.Meyer-2

## GOSPEL OF JOHN THE LIFE AND LIGHT OF MEN LOVE TO THE UTTERMOST

F. B. Meyer

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## 1. THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."--John 3:14.

IN A WELL-KNOWN picture, a modern painter has given us an imaginary incident in the youth of our Lord. It is the carpenter's shop. Boards sawn for use are propped against the walls, the floor is strewn with chips and curls of wood and heaps of sawdust, various tools mingle in the confusion, or are placed in the rack ready for use. Mary is kneeling close beside the Christ, the level rays of the setting sun strike through the casement, and as the young carpenter draws Himself to his full height and extends his arms, a shadow as of one crucified is thrown on the opposite wall. Mary, at least, sees that shadow of the cross, and it recalls the prediction of the venerable Simeon, which had for the moment chilled her motherly rapture, whilst he foretold the sword which should pierce her soul.

This, of course, is fancy; and yet it is without doubt that, to Mary, at least, the anticipation of crushing sorrow, in connection with that wondrous Being with whom her own life was so mysteriously entwined, was an ever-present source of grief.

When did the first realization of his death break on the human consciousness of our blessed Lord? Of course, as the Son of God, He must always have anticipated it. From eternity it had been present to his mind. Before the mountains were brought forth, or the foundations of the earth were laid, in purpose and intention, He was the Lamb slain. He emptied Himself with the express purpose of becoming obedient to the death of the cross. But there was perhaps a moment when it first broke on his soul as the Son of Man. Whenever that moment was, it lay far back before the day when He took up his public ministry; for from his earliest words and onward to his latest it is evident that He was living in the anticipation of Calvary.

The shadow of the cross rests on all the incidents and words of his public life. Nowhere does the sun of his life shine in a clear sky. The darkness is denser here and thinner there, but it is everywhere; "as the twilight creeps noiselessly into evening's sunniest nooks, and quietly masters all the land without the winnowing of its silken wing being heard or seen." Let us for a moment trace it. Calvary is a low hill; but it casts a long shadow.

In his first appeal to his fellow-countrymen from the court of the cleansed Temple, He spoke clearly of the destruction of his body, in which the destruction of their own Temple was foreshadowed (John 2:19).

In his first recorded conversation He said positively and unmistakably that He must be lifted up, not simply to the right hand of the Father, but as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14). Between Him and the bright Home whither He was going lay the blackness of the midnight of the cross.

He spoke of his flesh as given for the life of the world (John 6:51). He broke the full horror of his death to the inner circle of his adherents on the eve of his transfiguration, exciting their vigorous remonstrance (Matt. 16:21); He set his face to go to Jerusalem, knowing full well that the predicted hour had nearly struck (Luke 9:51); He described the Good Shepherd as giving his life for the sheep (John 10:11); He accepted the gift of Mary's love for his burying (John 12:7); his last utterances were full of similar references (John 15:13); He went to meet the band which Judas led, knowing the while to what He went (John 18:4).

And perhaps there is no scene in all his life more touching than when the question of certain Greeks, at the close of his public ministry, plunges Him into deep and heart-rending meditation; from the midst of which come the cries of his human soul in agony,

and He uses again these very words about the Son of Man being lifted up, adding to them a marvellous forecast of the effect that it should have on the minds and hearts of men throughout all lands and all coming years (John 12:32-33).

## **I. THE HEROISM OF THE SON OF MAN.**

He evidently foresaw all. The bodily torture--the shame and spitting; the racked muscle and quivering flesh; the slow agony of death--these were present to Him, and the bitterness of the soul, and the God-forsakenness of the spirit. He to some extent must have gauged the weight of the world's sin, which He was to bear away. And his soul was troubled beyond what words can tell, as He came within the penumbra of that eclipse. No eye would pity, no hand would save; lover and friend must stand afar off; the disciples would forsake Him and flee; the very heavens would veil their blessed light. He must be accounted as "sin", and go forth alone as the scapegoat. In front of Him He saw the winepress which He must tread alone. And yet He was not rebellious, neither turned away. He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; He hid not his face from shame and spitting (Isa. 1:6).

Who does not know the pain of anticipating some awful agony--a separation from some twin soul, an operation, an inevitable break-up of some blessed abode of human bliss? Under circumstances like these, the life drags on its weary length in almost unsupportable anguish, which gnaws it away, as the fret of the sea-billow does the base of the cliffs. At such times the very even we dread is almost a welcome relief from the agony of anticipation. And it is conceivable that the outward tumult of Calvary was positively this to the human nature of Jesus.

And yet He never faltered. Is there not a side light here on the heroic tenacity of his purpose, on the strength of his will! Gentle as a woman, He is mightier than the mightiest of men. Simple as a child, He is strong as God. Lamb though He be, He is Lion too. "For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame." What wonder, then, that having overcome the natural instinctive dread of the pain of death in which all men, more or less, participate, He has been able to overcome the world, and its prince, and the power of darkness, and to save with a great salvation!

This Saviour of ours, my brothers, is no effeminate weakling, no creature of circumstances, no hysterical enthusiast; but a Man who knew what it was to endure the long strain of anticipated agony; who could suffer silently, locking up the secret in his heart; who could face without blanching the direst anguish that man ever bore. It may be that you, too, have some kind of prevision of the cross and shame which await you; but be strong, yea, be strong, because He has gone this way before you, and can make you more than conquerors. You can go through no darker rooms than He has traversed; and you may have what He could not have, the company of One who is touched with the feeling of your infirmities, because He has been tempted in each point like you. Let those especially who, through fear of death, are all their lifetime subject to bondage, understand how completely the blessed Lord can sympathise with them; and let them claim his heroism, and that He Himself should be in them that strength and confidence which they need.

## **II. THE NATURE OF HIS DEATH.**

**Evidently it was not a martyrdom,--**

A martyr is wholly at the discretion of his foes. His main object, as the name denotes, is to give a witness to certain neglected and unpopular truths. He is engrossed with this, and does not specially address himself to the question of his fate. If he prove a hindrance and reproof to the men of his time, he must probably suffer the direst penalty they can inflict. But it is no part of his primary purpose to incur that fate; and he has not thought of expiating the sin of those who hound him to his death.

Far different was the main purpose of the Lord Jesus. True, He came as a witness to the truth; but most of all He came to be the sin-offering of our race, and to pass through death into resurrection on behalf of a company which no man can number. Other men die because they have been born; our Lord was born that He might die.

**His death was voluntary.--**

The Father sent the Son; but the Son came. He was not forced suddenly and unexpectedly into the scenes of death. He deliberately walked directly into them, fore-knowing and choosing all. Never for a moment did He admit that his life was taken from Him. He said that He laid it down of Himself, and that He had received this power from his Father. Never for a single moment did He swerve from the acquiescence of his will with his Father's. And can we doubt the voluntary character of his death, as we remark how safe He was until his hour had come, and whilst He remained among the hills of Galilee, or as we behold the marvellous display of his power which flung his captors to the ground on their backs?

No unwilling victim He! Not dragged to the slaughter! "Led!" From the depths of his steadfast soul the words rang out, "I delight to do thy will, O my God." He trod the path to the brow of Mount Moriah as willingly as Isaac had done in his innocence before Him; though He knew, as the lad did not know, that He was to be God's Lamb.

But if all were voluntary, how splendid the tribute to his love! A love that never faltered; that counted the gain more than the pain; that was prepared to bear all to win his Bride. Oh, love of the heart of Jesus, the more we think of thee, the more thou passest knowledge, whilst we stand baffled before thy depths and heights! A love that gave itself under the spell of some sudden impulse were much; but a love that could steadily face years of soul-gnawing agony, this is love indeed! Blessed is the spirit which will resign itself to the inevitable; but more blessed far the spirit which, for very love, will resign itself to the inevitable, and stand at a stake, or hang on a cross, constrained, not by chains or nails, but by its own devotion.

#### **His death was necessary.--**

The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, if it were not to live alone. I love that word must. If there had been another way it would have been selected; but there was no other way. In no other way could the love of God have free course and be glorified. In no other way could the curse of Adam's sin be removed from the race. In no other way could our sins be borne, or our salvation achieved. In no other way could we obtain the life of God stored up in the human nature of Jesus. In no other way could He pass to his great reward. Must--God Himself had considered all other possible alternatives in vain, and this was the verdict of Deity. Must--in the very nature of things, it was peremptory. Must--it could not have been otherwise, if He would become the Saviour, Priest, King, Brother, and Life-giver of men. Oh, sad yet blessed necessity! Sad, because it cost Him so much; blessed, because it has brought us so much.

### **III. THE JOY OF THE SON OF MAN.**

Throughout all the long travail of his soul He was sustained and animated by one delightful anticipation. For the joy set before Him (Heb. 12:2), He looked through the shadow towards the sun-glints on the horizon to which He went. The joy of doing his Father's will, of rolling away all imputation from his Father's character. The joy of undoing the work of the first Adam, and of becoming, as the second Man, the Head of a redeemed race. The joy of drawing all men to Himself, and of winning for Himself the Church as his Bride. The joys of marriage, and victory, and deliverance, all crowded into one long ecstasy. This sustained and nerved his spirit.

We may just now be near despair. The days are dark. There is much to depress in the slow progress of the Church. The angels must weary as they stand at the twelve open gates of heaven counting the dribblets that pass in, while the multitudes reject the invitation of God's love. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold. But why should we falter or despair? He never did.

Let us keep our eye on the streaks of the breaking day. Let us keep our ears attentive for the first peal of the marriage bells. Let us cultivate his patience and his joy. "If we suffer with Him, we shall be glorified together." "O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory! The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Wherefore lift up your heads and rejoice, for your redemption draweth nigh.

Ah, what will not that day of redemption bring!--when the regions of the air will no longer be infested by wicked spirits, which rule the darkness of this world; when creation herself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, which was, perhaps, flung upon her by the sin and fall of Satan and his hosts; when the Bride of Christ, built up as Eve of old from her Bridegroom's wounded side, shall be brought to Him to share his authority and glory; when from our position beside Him we shall rule angels, and reign on the earth; when God shall have vindicated his wisdom and love in the permission of moral evil! Oh, day of surpassing blessedness; of light too dazzling for mortal eye; of rapture too intense for mortal hearts, we long for thee even as our Lord does! And for love of thee, will be content to wait till the mystery of iniquity has fulfilled its destined course, and we hear the voice that shall welcome us who have shared his sorrow to be partakers of his joy. "Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

## **2. "SENT"**

"For He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him."--John 3:34.

WE PASS but slowly over these earlier chapters of this marvellous Gospel, because they are so thickly strewn with treasures. And we need not grudge the time or labour; because they are the seed-plot of the whole. To understand them is to have a key to the inner life of our blessed Lord, and to gain the true standpoint for understanding not only this Evangel, but the other writings of the beloved Apostle.

The word which stands at the head of this chapter is full of the music rung out by the Christmas chimes. It was one of the watchwords of Jesus; and, with the exception of the word Father, oftener on his lips than almost any other; occurring twice in this chapter and more than forty times in this book, it challenges our attention. What does it mean? "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." This is an inquiry which is shrouded in deep and impenetrable mystery, dark with excessive light, before which angels are speechless; and yet it becomes us to know all we may, for employing one of his expressive parallels, on the evening of his first resurrection day, our Master said, "As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). In so far, then,

as we can understand the true meaning of the Father's mission of the Son, we shall be able to understand also the Son's mission of that little band which included not the Apostles only, but the two who had arrived from Emmaus, together with several others not formally included in the Apostolic circle (Luke 24:33); and which thus represents the entire Church, of which we are part.

## **I. THE ORIGIN OF OUR LORD'S MISSION.**

In his Divine nature our Lord was one with the Father and the Spirit in conceiving the marvellous scheme of man's redemption. In the essence of his being, the Lord our God is one God; and in the very depths of that absolute oneness, the plan of our redemption was conceived and planned, and its purpose executed. But it is also true that the whole Godhead was one with Christ in every act of his incarnation. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." "God was manifest in the flesh."

It is a mistake to describe the work of Jesus as if He stepped in between an offended God and a race of sinners, averting the thunderbolts which were being launched upon them, and interposing by his own action to appease an otherwise implacable wrath. It is undeniable that the holy nature of God is absolutely set against the wilful disobedience and ungodliness of sinful men. But, nevertheless, the loving nature of God yearns, with all the love that ever breathed through the being of our Saviour, over the fallen and erring children of our race.

The Roman Catholic errs in attributing more tender love and sympathy to the mother of Jesus than to her Son; and in calling upon her to intercede with Him for sinners, reminding Him of her motherhood. This we condemn, and rightly. We turn away, in spite of their consummate art, from the pictures in which the mother pleads with her enthroned Son, as from his throne He meditates vengeance upon the race that crucified Him. But let us take care lest we fall into a similar error, and suppose that the Son is more merciful than the Father; when, in point of fact, they are one in an indissoluble unity. Just as you may analyse the ocean brine in the creek that runs far up into the land, so you may analyse the nature of the Godhead in that marvellous inlet of Deity into the life of men, which we know as the Holy Incarnation. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

All this lies embedded in these most precious words: "He gave his only-begotten Son." "The Father sent the Son." At certain times, it may be desirable to accentuate the willingness on the part of our dear Lord, which made his incarnation and death his own act and deed of unparalleled love. But just now it is befitting to emphasize the other side of the wondrous mystery, and to insist that the love of the Giver is not less than the love of the Given; and that the compassion of the Sender was every whit as tender as that of the Sent. And in saying this, we surely gratify the heart of the Son, who repeatedly turned the thoughts of men from Himself to Him who had sent Him, as if He would attribute to Him any credit or praise which was due for so marvellous an interposition. "Neither came I of Myself, but He sent Me" (John 8:42). Just as the Holy Spirit deprecates the concentration of attention on Himself, lest aught should be diverted from the ever-blessed Son who sent Him (John 16:14); so does the Son pass on our love and trust which gather around Him so fondly, to the Father whose commissions it was his meat and drink, as the Son of Man, to fulfil. To use his own words, He sought the glory of Him that sent Him (John 7:18).

We often meet with those who concentrate all their thought and love on the Lord Jesus, but who have not yet learnt towards the Father that love which casteth out fear. To Jesus they pray. On Jesus they lean. In Jesus they rest. This is natural in the earlier stages of the Christian life. But it should not be ever so, or we shall become stunted and one-sided in our growth. As the Spirit reveals the Son, so we must ask the Son to reveal the Father, as He has promised to do to the weary and heavy-laden who come to Him; and ultimately the Father will reveal Himself to the loving and obedient heart (Matt. 11: 27, 28; John 14:23).

## **II. OUR LORD'S CONCEPTION OF HIS MISSION.**

We cannot tell what was in his thought when our Lord spoke so constantly of having been sent. Was there present to Him some parting scene in which the Father gave Him up to the work of our redemption? Is there an allusion in his words to a wrench, a surrender, a sacrifice, like that which rends our hearts when we give up to some necessary but distant and painful expedition, the one who is dearer to us than life? When the mother gives up her boy to the service of his country; when the newly-married bride waves her heart-breaking farewell to the husband who sails on some distant and perilous enterprise, and the chords of nature are strained to breaking: is there not some faint shadow of the yet more stupendous giving up on the part of the Infinite God? Gifts are only worth the love that makes them; an infinite gift means infinite love; and such love is capable of infinite pain (John 10:36).

But whatever it was that the Lord looked back upon, it is clear that the consciousness of his mission was one of the strongest and most formative factors in his human life. He realized that the Father had sent Him, not to condemn but to save the world (John 3:17); to be its Life, and Light, and Love; to reveal to men the hidden nature of the invisible God; to put down all rule, authority, and power; and to deliver back the kingdom to God the Father, so that God might be all in all.

He was utterly absorbed in this commission.--He had no thought of Himself, of his own glory, or of the esteem of men. To be about his Father's business; to do the works which his Father had given Him to finish (John 5:36); to speak the words which He had heard from the Father (John 8:26); to fulfil the commandment enjoined on Him by the Father (John 12:49)--these constituted the

programme and object of his life. Dear as was the salvation of the world, and the winning of the Bride of his choice, all was subordinated to a higher purpose, and included in the sweep of a wider plan, by the accomplishment of the purpose of his Father's will. Hence his judgment was unbiased and just, because his motive was absolutely pure (John 5:30).

Surely it would be well if we were animated by the same ardent passion. We set ourselves too low an aim, hence so much of the disappointment that comes in Christian endeavour. We set ourselves to seek the conversion of the unsaved, the building up of believers, the extension of the kingdom of our Lord; and are depressed unless the special aim on which we have set our hearts is realized. But if only we could labour in the spirit of our Master, and understand that we are co-workers with Himself in his devotion to his Father's purpose, we should feel that, if only we were true to that, we were fulfilling our life-plan, even though some pet ambition remained unrealized and unfulfilled. "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength." The sun includes, in his march through space, the motions of his satellites; and to live to do the will of God includes all those other motives which enter into the life of men.

Our Lord believed that the Father's supplies were adequate to the needs of his commission.--God never sends us to do a work for which He does not equip and enable us. And in doing his work, it is wise constantly to be falling back on his resources. The one thing of which we need to be assured, and the only thing concerning which we should be at all anxious, is the assurance that we are where God would have us be, and engaged on his work. Where this is clear, we need have no care for anything beside. God is pledged to find the stuff for every tabernacle which He commissions us to build. He expects no soldier to conduct a campaign at his own charges. If we go down the mine, He will hold the rope, and send down all supplies.

This was our Lord's attitude. "As Son of Man He had emptied Himself of those inherent attributes which were his as the equal and Fellow of God; they were always within his reach, but He forbore to use them; and elected to live a life of complete dependence, yielding up his holy will, and receiving by faith, as we should, all the reinforcements and supplies required in the execution of his commission.

He lived by the Father (John 6:57); He was ever conscious of his Father's companionship, robbing life of its loneliness (John 8:29); He expressly denied that his works or words were his own, and insisted that they were all given, as He needed them, by Him who had sent Him forth (John 14:10-24). Remember how He said, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent Me" (John 7:16); and how He hastened, amid the gathering shadows, to work the works of Him that had sent Him (John 9:4). It was his sufficient justification to the accusation of his foes, that He was only working out what the Father had wrought within Him, up to that very moment of time, Sabbath though it were (John 5:17).

### **It is a lesson which we need in this busy life to ponder deeply.**

There are three stages in the dying of self.

**First**, we must die to self as being able to achieve our justification;**then** as being able to effect our sanctification; and **lastly**, as being able to accomplish any efficient spiritual work.

We must learn to die to the energy of the self-life in our Christian activities. He who sent us must give us the plan, and supply us with the power. The doctrine we teach, the words we speak, the works we do, must be received by us from Him who has sent us, as his were received from the Father who sent Him. Then a great peace would settle down upon us, born of a great faith; and we should be able to say, with the saints of a former age, "Thou wilt ordain peace for us; for Thou hast wrought all our works in us." He whom God hath sent has only to speak the words of God.

Difficulties are absolutely nothing to the man who knows that he is on the mission on which God has sent him. They are only opportunities for Him to show His power; problems to manifest His skill in their solution; thunder-clouds on which to paint the frescoes of His unrealized tenderness. Oh to live as Jesus did, putting Him in that place in our lives, which his Father occupied in his own life; so as to say, The living Saviour hath sent me, and I live by Him, eating of his flesh, and drinking of his blood, depending on his help! (John 6:57).

### **III. THE HIDDEN POWER OF OUR LORD'S MISSION.**

"God giveth not the Spirit by measure." What a word is this! It is said that Solomon gave up the task of enumerating the wealth of treasure that he put into the house of the Lord; and our Father puts no limit on the supply of his Spirit to those whom He sends forth.

As the Son was sent forth to do a work unparalleled in its scope, its sufferings, and its results, the blessed Spirit was bestowed on Him to a commensurate extent. Conceived of the Holy Ghost in the pure virgin; anointed by the Holy Ghost at his baptism; driven by the Spirit into the wilderness; nerved, empowered, sustained by the Eternal Spirit in his sacrifice on the cross; raised by the Spirit of Holiness from the dead; and ever receiving from the Father new supplies of the Spirit in his ascension and mediatorial reign: let

us be glad and rejoice, for if such measureless supplies came down on the head of our Aaron, we may gladly anticipate some droppings for ourselves as they run down to the fringe of his skirts.

That Spirit which rested on Him is ours. And we may have all of Him that our exigencies demand or our faith can take. There is absolutely no limit save that which we ourselves impose. The oil will go on running so long as we can bring vessels, and will only stay when there is not a vessel more. "He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think."

On the one hand is our life mission to do the will of Jesus, who has sent us, and who waits to show us what He wants us to do; on the other hand is the unmeasured supply of the measureless Spirit that empowered his earthly life. He is our life-blood, our inspiration, our bond of connection with our Head; nothing shall daunt, nothing overmaster us; the works that He did we will do, yea, greater works than these, because He is gone to the Father, and with added power shall do through us by his Spirit what even He, in his earthly life, could not effect.

### 3 LIFE AS A FOUNTAIN

"Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."--John 4:14.

HIS NINE months' tour in Judaea was too successful to please the Pharisees; and it became necessary for our Lord to transfer the scene of his ministrations to Galilee, where the authority of the Sanhedrim was less rigorous, and the people were liberalized by the larger admixture of Gentile residents. There were two roads thither from Jerusalem, the circuitous one along the Jordan valley, and the more direct one through Samaria. Jesus selected the latter for reasons which dated from the council-chamber of eternity.

It was the month of January. The weather bright and warm; the copses vocal with sweet-voiced birds; the brooks murmuring along their beds; the pasture-lands bright with flowers; and all the land astir with the sounds of industrious toil. After a morning's walk, about noon, the little band reached the neck of a narrow valley that lay between the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim. And there the embrasure of an ancient well lent a ready resting-place for the Master; whilst his disciples went forward to the town of Sychar, lying some mile and a half further up the valley, to purchase food.

He sat there, deeply musing on the beauties of the scenery and the historic associations of the place, and in fellowship with his Father. Few came to the well at that hour, though later it was thronged with women, bringing their pitchers to obtain a supply of water for their homes. But, presently, the solitude was broken by a woman of Samaria, who, avoiding her sex, came at an hour when she would be unobserved, and escape the taunt, the sneer, the averted look, of those who had not fallen, perhaps because they had never been tempted, as she had. To this woman, on that spot, our Lord spake words which are immortal.

That well-head is, indeed, a pulpit from which He addresses all who wearily seek after life and joy and blessedness, bidding them to Himself.

#### I. THE CONTRASTS OF THIS CHAPTER.

He is evidently under constraint, for the word must (John 4:4) is applied to Him; yet He speaks with the accent of unlimited prerogative.

He is weary; yet He proposes to give rest from heavy burdens and wearisome pilgrimages (John 4:15).

He asks for a drink of water; yet He offers to set flowing wells and fountains of water (John 4:10).

He is a suppliant for the gifts of another; yet He talks of being able to give with unlimited munificence (John 4:14).

He is an obscure stranger; yet He is greater than the venerable patriarch whose name had lingered for long centuries round that spot (John 4:12).

He hungers; yet He eats of meat of which no one knows, and finds sustenance in the act of doing the will of his Father (John 4:34).

He is surrounded by the signs of sowing time; yet He proclaims that He is amid the joys of harvest (John 4:35).

But chief among these contrasts is the one drawn by Himself between the cool, deep, dark depths of Jacob's well, about a hundred and fifty feet below, and the springs or fountains which He was prepared to open up in the heart of this woman, and of whomsoever else He could induce to accept them.

The "living water" should be a fountain.--At the best the water in Jacob's well was stagnant; but this should rise up with all the spontaneity and freshness of a spring, whose sources lie far up among the hills, and which is ever flashing up with graceful beauty from the surface of the ground.

It should be within.--The inhabitants of Sychar, like us, had to go out to get their supplies. Like the woman, they all went thither to draw; they have thus become types of all the world (for it is the universal habit of men to go outside themselves for their delights and pleasures); but this should be within, like those springs of water in the castles of Edinburgh and Dover, which are beyond the reach of the invader, and flow with perennial blessing for the beleaguered garrisons (John 4:14).

It should be eternal--Jacob's well would dwindle in its supplies, choked with stones and debris; but this would rise up in the hearts where it was opened, unaltered by the flight of years, unstanchd by summer's heat or winter's frost, descending from the timeless life, and returning to it again, eternal as the nature of God (John 4:14).

It should be satisfying.--"Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again," is a legend that might be engraved on the low stone wall of Jacob's well; and equally on every theatre, and other place of worldly amusement or sin, the votaries of which get sips, not draughts: but this would satisfy. In the failure of human love, in the absence of blessed friendships and companionships, in the subsidence of every Cherith brook, those who received what He longed to bestow should never thirst.

Oh, brother-men, have ye received this blessed gift, with its fresh spontaneousness, its inner hidden blessedness, its eternal timeless essence, its power of entire satisfaction? If not, why not seek forthwith from Him by faith a boon so inexpressibly precious, to have which were to make wildernesses flower and deserts sing? How foolish to barter this for jewels, pearls, or gold; for earthly delights; for worldly success!

And if you ask me what it is which He describes under this charming imagery, I reply, It is true religion; nay, better, it is the love of God in the soul; nay, best of all, it is Himself. Jesus in the heart--living there by the power of the Holy Spirit; descending thither in great humility; and rising up in us ever fresh, ever refreshing, ever fertilising, amid the droughts and desolations and wildernesses of our mortal life.

## **II. THE INDEPENDENCE OF CHRIST.**

### **(1) He is independent of race.**

It was of no consequence to Him that this woman was a Samaritan, He being a Jew. At one bound He overleaped the barriers of national prejudice, and offered his most precious wares to an alien. He is the Son of Man, and deals with that one human heart which beats under all breasts alike. In Him is neither Jew nor Gentile. His Gospel, like bread, water, spring flowers, love, is independent of race.

### **(2) He is independent of religious bigotry.**

In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, these mongrel Samaritans had sought to be included with the Jewish people; a proposal which met with strong rebuffs. They resented the affront; built a temple of their own at Gerizim to rival that at Jerusalem; claimed for their mountain a superior holiness to that of Zion; favoured the Romans because the Jews hated them; and even defiled the Jewish temple by scattering bones there at the time of the Passover. The Jews therefore had no dealings with the Samaritans, and held that salvation was only from themselves.

But the Lord Jesus brushed all this aside, as a man might a cobweb swinging across a garden pathway. What were these distinctions to Him, so long as those who sought the Father did so in spirit and in truth? (John 4:24) The flock was more to Him than the folds; the army than the device on the banner of any single regiment. And so it will be with us, in proportion as we partake of his spirit. Surely the time is coming when we shall see Christians of all schools drawing into an outward unity, and viewing with comparative indifference the various names by which they have been tarred.

### **(3) He is independent of character.**

The people who possess a character of which they are proud, who can produce first-rate testimonials as to their flawless conduct, and who can trace back a long pedigree of religious ancestry, do not stand so good a chance with Him as this woman did; because, though hitherto she had been abandoned and fallen, yet of late there had been gleams of desire for better things, which proved her capacity for the richest bestowments that He could make. It is to the worthless, and sick, and hopeless, that our Lord is primarily sent.

### **(4) He is independent of payment.**

"The water that I shall give."

The white-robed company clustering around the throne cannot give it, nor the morning stars that rejoiced over the birthday of the young world; nor the venerable elders; nor the living creatures with their ceaseless chant. But the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne pours forth its ceaseless floods from the very heart of that throne. And He can give, because He gave Himself up to the

death of the cross. By the agony that issued in the cry, "I thirst," He was enabled to open fountains adequate to banish thirst from the universe of God.

#### **(5) He is independent of apparatus.**

"Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep."

Yes, it is deep---deep as the nature of God; as his deep things; as the excellent height of glory; as the bottomless pit of human need; but He needs nothing with which to draw the waters. He speaks, and it is done. He utters his voice, and the earth melts. He breathes a wish, and life pours into the sea of death, and sweeps it away for ever.

### **III. THE PROBING OF THE SINNER'S HEART.**

"Go, call thy husband!" What a train of memory that word evoked! Beneath its spell, she was back long years; again an innocent girl, courted by him in the sunny vineyards of Gerizim; going with him to his home as his loving wife. Then perhaps there came a growing coldness, leading to alienation and dislike, ending in infidelity. That husband might have died of a broken heart. She had tried to banish his memory and his face, though they would haunt her. What a spasm of remorse and fear seized her, as she remembered that grave within her heart, where her first love lay buried, trampled down by the unholy crew of wilder later passions!

But why awake such memories? Why open the cupboard-door and bid that skeleton step down? Why unsod that grave? Why lay bare that life-secret? It could not be otherwise. The wound must be probed to the bottom and cleansed, ere it could be healed. There must be confession before forgiveness. The sin had to be called to remembrance, ere the son could be raised from death by the prophet's hand. This woman must judge her past sins in the light of those pure eyes, ere she could know the bliss of the fountain opened within the soul.

So it must be with us, if we would have the living water. Go, call thy husband; pay back those dishonest gains; make up that longstanding feud; recall those violent, uncharitable words; summon husband, wife, child, that bright-eyed boy whom you misled, that pure fame you tarnished, that nature, like virgin snow, which you trampled under foot. Call them, I say. Will they not come? Then call them louder and louder yet. Ah, they cannot come; they will never come till summoned by the archangel's voice! But, though they come not, Jesus says to thee, "Come hither." At his feet there is forgiveness and plenteous redemption. His hands can scatter benediction. His lips are laden with messages of comfort and peace.

But there must be complete confession.--"The woman said, I have no husband." It was quite true; but there was a further truth. She was living in illicit union with one not her husband, having had five husbands. Ah these fatal secrets which no man has the right to pry into! --shame bids us hide them; but in dealing with the great High Priest we must not hide or cloak one of them.

If we will not do this of our own accord, He will do it for us, extracting the whole black story from our lips by questions; or Himself telling us, as He did this woman, the naked story of the past. Nothing that has ever occurred in our lives has escaped the keen notice of Christ, or been forgotten by Him; and here or hereafter we must hear every detail told with circumstantial clearness by his lips. But it is a thousand times better to hear it now, when the dread recital may be followed by the loving announcement: "Thy sins, which were many, are all forgiven thee."

How we wince when our Lord comes into such close quarters with us!--as the bloodshot eye dreads the light, or the broken limb evades the touch, or the bankrupt hides his ledgers. Like this woman, we start some old worn-out theological controversy, to put Him off the scent (John 4:20). There are plenty of people who spend their lives in theological disputes and refinements, because in this way they dexterously manage to pass muster as religious people; though, all the while, they dread anything like definite appeals to their hearts.

But when the ordeal has been borne, and the confession made, the soul receives the blessed inrush of the living water; and, unable to contain itself, speeds to tell the wondrous story to those who have been most familiar with its former life; and, as it narrates the marvellous experience of what it has discovered Christ to be, a whole city full of people are stirred with the throb of genuine revival, and hasten to the feet of Him who is Priest and Prophet both--Prophet to tell us of all things that ever we did, and Priest to absolve.

## **4. DARING TO ACT IN FAITH**

"Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way, thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him."--John 4:50.

SPEAKING after the manner of men, our Evangelist is very particular in his selection of the incidents in the life and ministry of our Lord which he records. For the most part, he avoids those given by the Synoptists; and chooses fresh and unique illustrations of

the outflowing of that fullness which it pleased the Father should dwell in Him.

But, in addition to this, he selects those that suggested conversations and discourses which he desired to record. In nearly every case there is an evident object in the recital of any given incident, because of the deep and blessed spiritual lessons to which it gave rise; the kernel in the shell; the apple of gold in the picture of silver.

It has often, therefore, been a matter for question, what specific purpose was served by the introduction here of the story of this pious nobleman. It is an exquisite incident; and no doubt chronologically it belongs to this period of our Saviour's ministry. It may have been one of those stories which the mother pondered in her breast, from the day when she first heard it fresh from the lips of those who were immediately concerned. But is there no further reason for its insertion here? Surely there is. And we can but adore the grace of the Holy Spirit who arranged that there should be placed on record so graphic and touching an illustration of what faith is, and how it takes and appropriates God's best gifts.

We all know what it is to ask for blessings which the heart craves, as flowers do sunshine, and children love. For some of these we are able to quote a definite promise, in which God has pledged Himself to give what we need. When this is the case, it is not enough to plead for an answer in a perfunctory, careless way on the one hand, or in a half-despairing tone on the other. But to claim the answer, and take it from the open hand of God, not always feeling a sensible communication pass between Him and us, but sure that it has done so, and that we have the petitions we desired of Him; the basis of our confidence being our certainty that He will keep his word. At such times, though there may be no single sign of an answer to our prayer, no cloud, small as a man's hand, presaging the great rain, yet we are able to go down the mountain slopes, thanking God in anticipation for the blessing which we have received from his fatherly bounty.

There are other cases in our inner history in which we are unable to cite a specific promise, or an analogous case, from God's Word; but a conviction is wrought into our-hearts by the Spirit of God. It cannot be accounted for by natural or constitutional causes; it thrives amid the most searching self-scrutiny, and gathers strength as we pray about it through the years; it is corroborated by the trend of spiritual principles, and the circumstances of daily providence. Concerning any such matter, it is also possible, not only to beseech and pray, but to reckon with an assured faith--a faith based on the character of God--that He will do according to the Word on which He has caused us to hope. The cases of the conversion of beloved friends, and of restoration to health, amongst many others, may be included in this second class of claiming prayers.

It is obvious that many of our prayers do not come under either of these two headings. They are not based on promise; they cannot stand the tests which have been just suggested. And, as a consequence, we cannot exercise faith concerning them; or reckon on the answer being forthcoming; or give thanks as those who are sure that the blessing has been consigned, even if not delivered. Such prayers after awhile will fade and die away on the lips which once uttered them most passionately. The man who lives near God cannot exercise faith for, and will soon leave off praying for, or desiring, the things which it is not God's will to grant.

Dismissing, then, these latter prayers, which are born in the un-reclaimed wastes of our inner life--as the ignis fatuus in the swampy morass, and which vanish before the increasing light of the perfect day--we have to deal with those prayers concerning which we are authorized to exercise a faith that cannot be misled. And in all such cases it is clear that we are called upon, not only to offer up prayers and supplications, with strong cryings and tears, unto Him that is able to save and help, but to take deliverance, and go on our way sure and glad; not looking for our warrant to any set of emotions, but to the unchangeable word and character of the Eternal God.

This is precisely what this nobleman did. News travelled fast through the crowded populations of Galilee. With lightning speed the tidings spread that He whose boyhood and manhood had been spent among their hills, whose first miracle had been wrought in one of their village homes, and who had already attracted the notice and hatred of the leading dignitaries of the metropolis, was again among them, and at Cana. The Galileans received Him with open arms, "for they had seen all things that He did at Jerusalem at the feast."

Amongst others, the tidings reached this nobleman, perhaps Chuza, Herod's steward, or Manaen, his foster-brother. It was a sad time with him; for his son was at the point of death. But there was suggested a sudden hope; and he started at once to use every endeavour to bring this wondrous Miracle-worker to his home. He never supposed that the Master could as easily heal from a distance; or that He could, if need were, raise the dead; but he had faith to believe that where He came disease must flee.

Our Lord, with unerring accuracy, detected the weak point of his faith: it needed so many outward signs and encouragements; it must have the assurance of the outstretched hand, the audible voice, the physical presence; it craved the assurance which the outward and physical, the sensuous and emotional, supply. And in the absence of these it was in danger of expiring. But faith like this hardly merits the name, though, alas! it is too common with us all. We are brave at swimming so long as we are in our depth. We are grand soldiers so long as we stay within the castle enclosure. We believe so long as we can see or feel.

But wherever our Lord finds faith He sets Himself to mature and foster it. There was a germ of it in this suppliant's heart, capable of expansion into a noble growth; and He beheld it with eager joy, and immediately sought to develop it by the only means through which faith can ever grow--namely, by trial. "Jesus said unto him, thy son liveth." That was all. No sign, no renewed assurance, no appeal to emotion or sense; just the assurance of those majestic tips, and it was enough. Without another word, and apparently without hesitation, "the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and went his way."

Comparing the length of time occupied on his homeward journey with the distance between Cana and Capernaum, the conviction forces itself home on our minds that he made no particular haste back. Why should he? The boy was living, doing well. The home was already astir with glad surprise. He was sure of it, probably had thanked God for it, and could not be more sure though he were to see the bright smile of his darling. And it is quite likely that he stayed for the night at some wayside inn to sleep off, in a long, deep, child-like sleep, the effects of long watching, intense anxiety, and the swift journey to Cana. There was nothing extraordinary in this. Faith, when it is as it should be, is as restful and glad for a promise as for some evident deliverance. Could there be a better illustration of the simple faith which believes the promise of God, and acts upon it, reckoning on the accomplished purpose of its prayer? We may apply this in several directions.

### **(1) For forgiveness.**

Suppose you come, as a penitent, to the great High Priest, conscious of a very heavy load of sin. It may be for the first time or the thousandth. You tell the sad, dark story, not hiding or extenuating aught; not excusing or palliating; not trying to shift the blame on others; not lumping all sins together, but naming each alone, as brought to mind by the Holy Spirit. And when the confession is complete, you naturally look up and ask for forgiveness. But you have a perfect fight to go a step further, and claim it; yes, and be thankful for it, even though as yet you have not caught a glint of light from his face.

He who said to the nobleman, "Thy son liveth," says that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Oh that we would believe this word which Jesus speaks, and go our way, restful and satisfied that so it is! Instead of this, we try to feel forgiven. Now, suppose that the nobleman had tried to feel that his son rived before he started home. In all probability he would never have started. But the question of what he felt does not seem to have entered his mind. It was enough to him to have heard the voice of Jesus, and he started with buoyant assurance.

It is a mistake to wait for feelings. Believe the word of God. Will to believe it. Take forgiveness. Thank the Lord for it. Reckon that it is so because He has said it, even if you do not experience a thrill of emotion. And if you dare to step out in faith, you will discover how blessed are they that believe; for there is always a performance of those things spoken by the Lord.

### **(2) For victory over sin.**

How many fail because they are always praying for deliverance, without claiming and giving thanks for it! They go to the Lord Jesus each night with the same story of defeat, and each morning utter the same almost despairing cry for help--a cry that seems to strike against the irresponsive heaven, for it brings no deliverance. Yet the Lord has promised to save his people from their sins, and to keep them from falling. It is not enough, then, to ask Him to do it. We may, and should go further, and say, "Do as Thou hast said."

Claim victory, take victory, thank for victory before even you go into the fight, in the assurance that Jesus will be around you as a wall of fire, an invisible but real defence. He said, "I give you power to tread on all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." There it is waiting for you; appropriate it, and go your way, saying like David as he entered on his conflict with Goliath, "The Lord saveth, for the battle is the Lord's."

### **(3) For all the priceless gifts of the Christian life.**

How shall we take that gift of living water of which our Lord speaks, which quenches all thirst and pacifies all desire, and makes the inner life like a garden of the Lord, and even issues forth to water and refresh others? We cannot feel it enter. There is no flow of purling streams in liquid music. But we can take the priceless boon by faith.

The heart, for instance, may be aching for "the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still." It thirsts. But it goes to Christ, and lays open its need, and claims the all-satisfying draught. Instantly Christ meets the claim, and fills the longing soul with goodness. "My peace, my rest, my satisfying joy I give thee, dear heart," says He; "be comforted." And the soul believes the word which the Master has spoken, and goes its way, not feeling any strong surge of emotion, but assured that it has received great spiritual bestowment; and as the days go by, in its power to endure, its patience, its calm joy, it knows that it was not a vain thing to wait on God.

And so it is with all God's promised gifts, and especially that of the Holy Spirit. If we wait to feel them, we shall miss them. But if we dare to claim them, taking them by faith, and uttering words of thanks, it shall be to us according to our faith.

It is not always possible to exercise this faith which claims. At such times it is useless to fix our attention on the faith, for faith is the result of other things. And if it is deficient, it will be wise on our part to turn our thought on these, and question where we are wrong.

Of course, God will never allow us to believe for anything which is outside his purpose to give. Very often we lack faith, not because the object we seek is outside God's purpose, but because our spiritual life is at so low an ebb. The thing is there on the shelf; but our faith cannot reach high enough to lift it down. Let us not rebuke ourselves merely as deficient in faith; but let us adopt that regimen on which alone faith can wax strong.

There are three conditions for the faith that can claim all that God is ready to give.

It must be associated with a good conscience (1Ti 1:5-19). So long as the conscience is uneasy and perplexed, conscious of evil not judged, and of a perpetual struggle to pacify itself, faith is as impossible as a mirror of the heavens on the sea when it is being swept by violent winds.

It must feed on the promises of God. Abraham is said not to have considered the physical difficulties in the way of the accomplishment of the Divine promise, but to have looked steadfastly towards, and reckoned absolutely upon, the word of his Almighty Friend. So must it be with us all. We cannot live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

It must dare to act in the absence of emotion, stepping out as bidden on the yielding water, in sheer faith, and finding that it becomes a sheet of rock beneath the feet. To such a faith nothing is impossible.

## 5. THE DIVINE MASTER WORKMAN

"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."--John 5:17.

AN INTERVAL of some months lies between the previous chapter and this, in which many of the incidents in our Lord's crowded Galilean life took place. Our evangelist does not touch on them--first, perhaps, because they had already been fully described by the other three; and secondly, because he wanted to concentrate all his force on the great contest which his Master waged in the very stronghold of Jewish prejudice, and which led, step by step, to the terrible final catastrophe of his death.

This visit to Jerusalem was, without doubt, crowded with incidents, of which a single specimen only is given here, because it introduced one of those startling disclosures of our Lord's inner being which roused undying opposition among his foes, but constitutes for ever a mine of spiritual wealth to those who love Him.

We must pass over the touching pathos of the incident itself, in order to fix on the salient feature, that our Lord not only healed the sufferer after thirty-eight years' deferred hope, but did so on the Sabbath, and bade him carry his bed home. This bidding clashed with Jewish custom and Pharisaic ritual; but the man rightly inferred that He who could work so great a miracle was supreme in the spiritual sphere, and could set aside the petty and vexatious exactions of the religious leaders of the time.

It was impossible, however, that the Pharisees and others could silently acquiesce in this assumption of a superior authority to their own; and they seem to have cited Jesus before the authorities on the formal charge of Sabbath-breaking. But his judges were little prepared for the line of his defence, which convulsed the assembly in paroxysms of religious fury, and revealed some of the deepest facts in our Lord's life and consciousness. His opening words contain the text and pith of all that followed: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

### I. OUR LORD'S CONSCIOUSNESS OF DEITY.

"He said that God was his Father," or, as the Greek might be rendered, "His own Father" (John 5:18). At another time He addressed God as our Father, and the Jews heard Him without scruple. But, when He spoke thus, they felt that He claimed God as Father in a unique sense, and they sought the more to kill Him; not only because He had broken the Sabbath, but because, in saying this, He had made Himself equal with God.

It is most important that we should not read our western notions into our Lord's references to his Sonship. We must understand them as they were understood by those to whom they were first addressed. In their judgment they conveyed the assertion of equality. And He who uttered them knew that it would be so, and carefully picked these very words because they meant so much. "He thought it not robbery to be equal with God."

To my mind that is almost the strongest proof of the Deity of our blessed Lord. Not primarily that He wrought marvellous works, or rose from the dead; but that his holy, humble spirit thrilled with the consciousness of his Deity. On these grounds I would be prepared to argue the whole question of our Lord's Divinity. By friend and foe alike, He is held to have been the holiest that ever

trod our earth. But the holiest must be the humblest. He will not strive, nor cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets; He will not assume anything which He is not; He will curtain, so far as He can, the intrinsic splendour of his nature. And yet, for all that, see how this meekest and lowliest of men accentuates his oneness and equality with God. This, indeed, was the charge on which He was condemned to die. Silent in reference to all other charges, when He was solemnly challenged as to this, He saw no incongruity between his desolate, suffering, rejected condition, and the claim to be, in a unique (and, to the Jewish mind, a blasphemous) sense, the fellow and equal of the Eternal (Matt. 26:63, 64; John 19:7).

But the Holiest must also be the clearest and most certain in all spiritual insight. Could it be otherwise? Our perception of the truth of things is dimmed and obscured by the grossness of our flesh, the earthwardness of our dispositions, the evil of our hearts. But when these are removed, we no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." It is a commonplace of moral philosophy that character means vision, insight, knowledge. We cannot but believe, therefore, that, even apart from his divine self-consciousness, our Lord could not have been deceived when He announced Himself as his Father's equal. To his perfect human soul all truth lay revealed as a summer landscape beneath the eye of the sun; and especially this truth, rearing itself prominently from among all the rest.

All other holy beings refuse in horror ascriptions of Divine homage and worship. Apostles and angels join in crying, "See thou do it not." Consider, then, how great this Man was who, though holiest and humblest of men, forbade none who would prostrate themselves before Him, falling on the ground and praying to Him as God.

Clearly, then, the Son of Man is competent to fulfil all the functions of God. Is untiring energy working ceaselessly through the ages characteristic of the living God? So it is of the Son of Man: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). Is it the prerogative of the Father to raise the dead, and quicken them? So it is of the Lord Jesus; listen to the majestic words: "The Son quickeneth whom He will" (John 5:21). Is it the peculiar right of the Creator to be the Judge of men, because He understands the mechanism of their inner being and weighs their opportunities? This is also the Redeemer's right: "The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son," and his voice shall summon the dead from their graves to his bar (John 5:22). Is it the peculiar attribute of God to be the fountain of life, so that life, inherent, underived, perennial, is ever rising up in his mighty being, maintaining here an angel and there a humming-bird? This is also an attribute of our blessed Lord. The glorious possession of inherent life is his also; it has been given Him to have life in Himself (John 5:26). The entire sum and totality of the attributes of Deity are resident in the nature of the Son of Man.

Obviously, then, men should honour the Son as they honour the Father (John 5:23). Nor has this been lacking. When He ascended to his throne, there followed Him from the heart of the Church a tide of adoration, which has only become deeper and wider with the lapse of time. In the first days of the Church, believers were known as those who called on the name of the Lord Jesus. To Him, the ascended and glorified Master, were addressed the prayers of the infant Church about to select an Apostle; of the first martyr, in the moment of his mortal agony--a moment which must ever test the habitual practice of the soul; of Ananias, who talked with a holy familiarity, which gives a glimpse into his prayer-closet: and these are but specimens of myriads. The records of early Church history teem with hymns, and prayers, and dying words, and fervent ejaculations, written on parchment, or scrawled in rude hieroglyphics on the walls of catacombs and prisons, all to the same effect.

The instincts of the Christian heart are not then hopelessly at fault when they prompt prayer to our ascended Lord. He does not scruple to ask for such honour as men give to God. He insists that they who do not honour Him withhold honour from the Father. He claims that every knee should bow to Him, and every tongue acknowledge that He is Lord. He does not chide the threefold circle of adoration, by which his throne is ceaselessly surrounded, as elders, saints, and angels fall down and worship the Lamb with the same adoration with which they adore the Supreme.

## **II. THE FELLOWSHIP BETWEEN THE SON AND THE FATHER DURING OUR LORD'S HUMAN LIFE.**

And as we study it, let us remember that golden key to the unlocking of the treasures of this precious Gospel, that we are to be to the Lord Jesus all that He was to his Father, and that He is willing to be to us all that his Father was to Him. And as we con these wondrous statements of that inner fellowship between Father and Son, we shall see that the after parable of the vine was founded on a union which already subsisted; and shall learn how close, and intimate, and all-embracing our Lord would fain have our union with Himself to become.

"He did nothing of Himself," i.e., He originated nothing, did nothing at the prompting of his own will; but always leant on his Father for direction and inspiration (John 5:19). No vine ever clung to its trellis-work, and no child to its mother, as He to his Father. Though all his Divine attributes were within his reach, and might at any moment have been called into operation, He forebore to use them, that He might learn the life of dependence and faith, the life which was to be ours towards Himself. This is why the sacred writers speak of the faith of our Lord Jesus (Gal. 2:20; Heb. 12:2).

He was ever conscious of his Father's love and presence.--He lived in the present tense of his Father's love, which was so real as

to rob his life of all sense of loneliness (John 5:20; 8:29). He knew that his Father heard Him always, as his spirit rose in perpetual fellowship and communion, unhindered by the densest clouds of human unbelief (John 11:42). Yea, there was something deeper still in his habitual realization that the Father dwelt in Him; so that his words, and works, and influence, and plan of life were the perpetual working out of what his Father was working in (John 5:17; 14:10). And why should not we live in a fellowship equally hallowed and close? It was his one desire that his relationship with his Father should be the model of our relationship with Himself (John 17:21, 22, 23). And thus it shall be by the grace of the Holy Spirit who, Himself God, is (if I may use the term) the all-pervasive medium between the Father and the Son, and who links all whom He fills into that same sacred oneness.

He was perpetually engaged in reading the open book of his Father's will.--He had no will of his own to seek, no object of his own to serve (John 5:30). He had come, in his Father's name, to do his Father's will, and to glorify his Father's name (John 5:30, 43; 17:4). It was the passion of his being to do God's work on God's plan. And his eye was thus ever kept on the movement of the cloud of his Father's unfolding purpose. The Father showed the Son what He was doing. And the Son, having seen it, translated it into the language of daily human life (John 5:20). But what a model for ourselves! If He whom we worship as Lord took on Himself so absolutely the form of a servant, how fair would our life be if we more deeply received of his spirit; and, through obedience here, prepared ourselves to sit by his side in the glory, and reign with Him!

These are glimpses of what our life may become. There will be pain to suffer, a conflict to maintain, a work to do, in face of opposition which may grow ever more violent; but, amidst it all, there may be unbroken fellowship with the ascended Lord by the grace of the Holy Spirit, through whom alone it can be originated and maintained. Ah, that clear heaven of azure blue, unflecked by cloud--what a reflection it casts on the face of the quiet, upturned heart! This is the spiritual equivalent of the land that drinketh water of the rain of Heaven!

### III. THE PLAN OF OUR MASTER'S WORK.

Our Lord was as careful of the promptings of his Father as a jeweller of gold leaf. If the Father wrought within Him up to any given moment of time, He never hesitated to give free play to the holy impulse, though it should bring Him into collision with the religion of his time. "See," said He, "Sabbath or no Sabbath, my Father moved Me to this miracle. I could do no other than yield. Ye must reckon with Him" (John 5:17).

He waited for the Father to show Him what next He would have Him do. The pattern of his life was gradually outspread before Him, as that of the tabernacle was unfolded before the great lawgiver, shut up with God. He seemed ever a learner in his Father's workshop, making all things on the pattern shown Him from hour to hour. This made Him so still, so calm, unmoved by difficulty, unperturbed amid a hail of murderous stones (John 8:59; 9:4). And it would bring rest, and unity, and power, into our own lives, if it were the one purpose of our being to discover and do only the good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Better do less that we may do more. Better stand still than run without being sent. Better withdraw oftener from the valley to the brow of the Transfiguration mount, than, by fussy activity, miss the radiant vision, and the bitter need which waits for us at the mountain foot.

And thus our Lord's life-work was ever on an ascending scale. From making water wine, to making blood the ransom price of souls; from raising the daughter of Jairus, to the calling of Lazarus from a three days' death-sleep; from cleansing the temple, to works of redemption, resurrection, and judgment. God was ever showing Him yet greater things. The plan of his life was ever becoming fuller; its stream deeper, its current swifter. Nor will it be otherwise with ourselves. Be true to the power you have, and it will increase. The limb becomes defter by use. And he who yields his 'prentice hand to be nerved and used by the great Master Workman, shall find, as the years pass by, that he will be able to accomplish results, the mere dreams of which had never visited him in the most ecstatic moments of his youth.

O glorious Servant of God, and worker for men, breathe into us thine own spirit; that following in thy steps we may at last participate in thy rest and reward!

## 6. THE WILL OF GOD

"I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me."--John 5:30.

THE PASSIONATE desire of the heart of the Lord Jesus was to do the Will of God. As He stepped down into our world, He appropriated David's words, with a significance that David could never have put into them, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me; I delight to do thy will, O my God." As often as He asked for daily bread, He prayed that that will might be done on earth, and doubtless in his own life. And He clung to it as a handrail down the steep dark staircase by which He went to his death, saying, as He descended into the gloom, "O my Father, thy will be done!"

It is evident, though we cannot penetrate the mystery in which the whole subject is enshrouded, that our Lord, as far as his human nature was concerned, had a will, which could be denied and subordinated to the will of his Father. We cannot fathom or explain, but we cannot ignore his repeated references to his own will. It was the perfect expression of his holy, glorious nature; but it was a distinct and special force in the mechanism of his inner life. "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father"; "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me"; "Not my will, but thine be done" (John 5:30; 6:38; Luke 21:42). He subordinated his own will to God's; and so came, as all do who begin by choosing it, to delight in it as altogether lovely.

To do God's will meant, in the experience of our Great High Priest, obedience to death, even the death of the cross; it meant shame and spitting, a breaking heart, a soul exceeding heavy, as laurels bending low under a weight of rain; it meant the cry of forsakenness. But He was ever nerved and sustained by the thought that it was the will of his Father. He did not look at the Fatherhood through the cross; but at the cross through the Fatherhood. Never for one moment did He lose faith in the infinite love which was leading Him through darkness into light, through death to life.

There are many thoughts given us in our Lord's acceptance of his Father's will.

## **I. IT IS THE SUFFICIENT PURPOSE OF LIFE TO DO THE WILL OF GOD.**

Among the aims of our Saviour's life we may enumerate his desire to save the lost; to put away sin; to purchase for Himself a people; to win for Himself a bride; to destroy the works of the devil. But all these were included in the sweep of a wider, grander purpose than any, as the orbits of the planets are included in the march of suns; viz., the sublime aim of doing his Father's will.

Nor is there anything loftier or more inclusive throughout all worlds than this; for the will of God is the perfect expression of his character, which is infinite love, strength, and wisdom, woven in perfect unity. But do we not often sink below this level, and, missing this high purpose, involve ourselves in disappointment?

Not infrequently do I receive letters from discouraged Christian workers in which they complain sorrowfully of the lack of conversions in their ministry, and questioning whether it would not be better for them to abandon their positions for some other calling. Now, it is right and Christlike to yearn with soul-travail over the lost, and to track them in their wanderings through the wild; and, if there is a cessation of salvation work in our service, it should lead to solemn questionings and searchings of heart. But neither this, nor the ebbing away of people, nor the appearance of failure, is a true indication that we should forsake our post. We cannot explore the Divine purpose, or know the special function which God is fulfilling by our means. The one question for us is, Are we where God would have us be? We may be pawns standing for hours on the same square of the chessboard; or sentries at outpost duty far from the camp : but if it is the will of God for us to be there, it is enough. We can laugh at what the world deems failure; we can exist without the fulfilment of our chosen gauges of success, if only we are in the current of our Father's will.

The ground is hard; the outlook unpromising; helpers few; success rare as a gleam across the sea on a stormy day. But God has put us where we are; and it is enough, abundantly enough.

We know God's will by several unmistakeable signs; by the sure impression of his Spirit on our heart; by the teaching of his holy Word; by the unerring indication of the circumstances in which we are placed, and by which we may be bound or tied or nailed to a certain post. We may suffer keenly; heart and flesh may threaten to fail; our lifeblood may seem to be ebbing drop by drop from our heart: but, if God shows us no way of escape, and no path of retirement, we must take it as his will that we should keep just where we are. It is his will, and it is enough. His blessed will! His lovely will! The will of our Father! Hush, my heart, there can be no mistake! He has not forgotten thee. And some day it will be a sufficient reward to know that He was satisfied.

## **II. THE BLESSED RESULTS OF DOING THE WILL OF GOD.**

### **(1) It feeds the spirit.**

An hour before, the Master had sent his disciples to buy food, and He, too exhausted to accompany them, awaited their return beside the well; but now that they have hastened back, He seems indifferent to the bread they bring. "Hath any man brought Him aught to eat?" No. But He has been fed in doing. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

So is it ever. Not only in the devout study of the Word, or in attendance on some public ministry, but in doing the will of God, though it may only lead to a wayside talk with a wayfarer, the soul is nourished and fed. Obedience to God's will can never take the place of communion with Him; but it is a valuable adjunct. Do what lies to your hand, not because you must, but because you discern God's will in it; and you will discover that to expend is to expand; that to give out is to increase; that to feed crowds is to accumulate baskets of provision; and that to water others is to be watered.

### **(2) It clears the judgment**

How often are we perplexed about our course! We stand where many roads meet, not sure which to take. We waver and vacillate,

and finally run to this friend or the other, or adopt some questionable method of ascertaining our path. Why all this difficulty? Much of it arises from the intrusion of self-will, which deflects our judgment, as the masses of iron on a steamship deflect the needle from the pole. Our eye is not single, and therefore our body is not full of light. "My judgment," said our Lord, on the other hand, "is just, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me."

Our God must have a purpose for each of his children, and in everything. In his mind there must be an ideal of what we should do under all circumstances of daily living. And He is not unwilling to show it to us; it is there held out for us to see; and if we fail to see it, it is probable that there is some obliquity in our vision. Beware of this; search your heart to see what it may be which prevents you from apprehending God's purpose. It will not be long ere you discover some lurking reluctance to have God's will done completely; and only when this is dragged to light and judged, will you descry the Star of Bethlehem glimmer out in the morning sky to guide you.

There are cases in which the will is unbiased by self-will, and yet it seems impossible to discern God's will : then we must wait; the lesson is evidently patience, and there is no alternative but to stand still, in spite of all remonstrances to the contrary, till a path is cleft through the mighty waters.

### **(3) It gives Rest.**

What an agony must they suffer whose life seems at the mercy of some cruel fate, or iron destiny, or implacable, unalterable law! They beat their breasts against the bars of their cage till they fall panting, dying to the floor. Many an imperturbable face hides a broken heart, or one eaten through with unrest. But as soon as the soul has learnt to recognise God's will in all the events of life in the falling of a sparrow to the ground, and of a hair from the head; in what God permits as well as in what He appoints : in the coming of a Judas to betray, as much as in the advent of an angel to strengthen --then there is rest. The current of the life which had dissipated itself in many side channels settles down to an even and steady flow towards the sea, which draws it to itself.

If you would look up, though with tear-blinded eyes, and recognise that it is your Father's will for you to be fixed in that difficult position; to be separated from that twin soul; to drink that bitter cup; to be exposed to calumny and hate; to do that uncongenial task; that it is the will of One who loves you infinitely, and is making all things work together for good--then you would find rest to your soul. This was Christ's way. The doing of the Father's will was the yoke He took and bore, and has consecrated for ever. So take your side by Him in the long, difficult furrow, yoked with Him. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me," said He, "for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest to your souls" (Matt. 11:29).

### **(4) It is the key to certain knowledge.**

We want to know. All around us stretches the great unexplored continent of God's nature, in which we have appropriated but a few acres of clearing. To know God would surely bring into our lives deeper draughts of that eternal life to drink of which quenches the inner thirst. But how shall we know Him, and how be sure of aught we think we know? There is no hesitation in our Lord's majestic answer : "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself" (John 7:17).

The cause of much of the ignorance of men is traceable to the will. They are not willing to know or to retain God in their knowledge. But when they renounce their prejudices, and put their wills on God's side, and become as little children, content to be taught, the true knowledge begins to steal into their being, and grows unto the perfect day. Then they no longer need books of evidences or arguments to prove the truth of Christ; they have seen Him for themselves, and know that the Son of God is come, and has given them an understanding, that they may know Him that is true.

In dealing with professed sceptics or seekers, or those who seem unable to believe, it is of the highest importance, therefore, to probe their will, and see if they are holding to anything which is inconsistent with this attitude of entire acquiescence with the will and ways of God; until this is the case, neither conversion nor regeneration is possible.

### **(5) It introduces to a large family.**

Our Master knew what loneliness was in his family life; for, with the exception of his mother, his nearest refused to believe in Him. What ecstasy, then, must He have felt on that day when, after his friends had endeavoured to stay Him from getting into deeper collision with the Jewish leaders, "He stretched forth his hand toward his disciples and said, Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

And is this really the case, that those who live in the will of God may claim the kinship of all in all worlds that live for the same? Are there bonds, invisible as air, yet firm as adamant, which bind us for evermore in family ties with all holy souls, and which knit us, above all, to Him, the Royal and Divine Man? Then isolation is impossible. Gulfs are bridged. Barriers are pierced. Space is annihilated. Christ and we may be one; and we may be one also with redeemed spirits, and bright angels, and all great souls that have been, are, and shall be, in so far as we and they participate in the fixed resolve to do or suffer in all things the will of God.

### III. AN EXHORTATION TO CHOOSE THE WILL OF GOD.

Refuse it, and it will crush you. Take it grudgingly, and it will chafe you into sores. Withhold from it some portion of your life, and you spoil your obedience in all the rest. But why all this reluctance? The will of God must be infinitely lovely and beautiful, because He is that. To put it away is to put Him away. To refuse it is to refuse Him. Stand out no longer, but yield!

So many make the mistake of trying to like the will of God, or of working themselves up into a state of resignation and stoical indifference. This will never do. Begin, not with it, but with Him. Distastefulness passes out of the will of those we love and trust. Choose Him, and you will come to choose his will. Will his will, and you will come to delight in it. Tell Him that you are willing to be made willing, and leave Him to bring every thought into captivity to Himself.

The will of God may lead into the garden of Gethsemane; but the path to the Easter dawn lies there. There is no other way, and there is no danger of being lost (John 6:39); but the certainty of an ever-deepening sense of blessedness, and serenity, and heaven, the law of whose perfect joy is that strong angels do his will, hearkening unto the voice of his Word.

## 7. THE FATHER'S NAME

"I am come in my Father's name."--John 5:43.

HOW MUCH there is in a name! A palace lay wrapt in mysterious slumber. The king asleep on his throne; his counsellors strewn in various attitudes on the highly-polished floors, each grasping tightly the symbols of his office, but all beneath the spell; the maidens twined in various attitudes by fountain and loom, which for many a year had stood unused. And what was needed to awaken all that sleep-bound palace, save the speaking of one word, the right word, the word which should untie the mystic spell? Many essayed to speak it, but in vain. Yea, themselves succumbed to the charm they failed to loose. And all around them crept the briar-rose. Until one came, before whose tread the thorns were changed to myrtles, and the thickset hedge to honeysuckle. He spoke the word which broke the spell of slumber, and again filled the silent palace with the hum of many voices and the stir of life.

It is a parable. And yet it is a truth. It is true, to a limited extent, in the case of individual hearts and lives, wrapt in lethargy until one voice shall speak that single word which shall arouse to animation, and kindle the glow of life and love. But it is a true picture also of the moral condition of the world. The hearts and consciences of the majority of mankind were drugged in fatal stupor, waiting through the ages spell-bound and torpid. Many a philosopher and teacher, reverend and grave, essayed to awaken the ear and heart of men; but all failed, till One came for whom all were waiting, though they knew it not, and He spake the great word which broke the silence of centuries, and shed life on death, light on darkness, love on despair. Do you ask what that word was? I answer: it was the name so constantly applied by our Saviour to God.--FATHER.

But, after all, a name may mean comparatively little. It may tell us something of the person who bears it, but not much. Call a man Jacob, or Moses, or Peter, and we infer that he is crafty in character; or was drawn out of a watery grave; or has a rock-like nature, in the clefts of which weaker men may hide. Yet, at the best, it is only a spar from a ship; a brick from a house; a flower from a garden. And the man is labelled, but not known.

So the Son of God was not content to speak of God as the Father; that name had been guessed in the previous centuries. Did not David sing that God pitied us, as a father pities his children? Did not Isaiah address God, saying, "Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us"? It was not quite a new name, though it was spoken with new force, and reminted as it passed through those gentle holy lips. But our Lord spent his life in showing how much that name "Father" connoted, or meant, when it was applied to God.

To understand this, let us imagine two young men standing together in some gathering of men for the interests of art or science or literature. Presently the attention of all is directed towards one standing to speak, who wins breathless hearing by his face and voice, "Who is that?" whispers one to the other. "He is my father," is the proud reply. But how little do the words mean to his companion! Then, as the two pass out together, the son begins to explain to his friend how much, in this case, lies behind that title, "father." It may mean so little. It may mean nothing more than the progenitor of life. But in this case it means brother, friend, teacher, adviser, all that men love and revere in one. So Jesus Christ was not satisfied to say that God was a Father. He set Himself to show what sort of Father He was; and what heights, and depths, and breadths, and lengths of meaning lay hidden in that one sweet, tender, though common and oft-spoken, word. This is what He meant when He said, "I am come in my Father's name."

Men are apt to speak lightly to one another about the Fatherhood of God, and to ignore the ministry of Jesus in explaining what that phrase involves. But in ignoring Him, they trample under foot the one torch which can illumine the sculptured glories of this wondrous rifle, Father. "No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27). We can only know the Fatherhood of God through the teachings of Jesus; just as we only know the Lord Jesus through the

teachings of the Holy Ghost, who makes Him real and present and precious. And, in fact, the man who talks of God the Father, and rejects Christ, proves that he knows nothing of the Father. "If God," said He on one occasion, "were your Father, ye would love Me; for I proceeded forth, and came from God" (John 8:42).

Many will read these words who do not know God as Father. They cannot look up into his face, and say, with a child's lisp, Abba. They are Christians; but they lack the consciousness of this benignant side of the character of God. He is rather the Judge, the Almighty, the Supreme. Such have need to know what Jesus meant when He said, "I am come in my Father's name." They have need to drink in the meaning of those words, with which our Lord summed up his earthly ministry to his own, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world" (John 17:6). They have need to learn the whole force of that promise with which our Lord forecast his posthumous ministry, and with which He closed his intercessory prayer, "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith Thou has loved Me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26).

## **I. THE MANNER IN WHICH OUR LORD DECLARED HIS FATHER'S NAME DURING HIS EARTHLY LIFE.**

Sometimes it was by contrast.--He would recall some trivial instance of a father's love and pity in giving bread, or fish, or eggs, to some suppliant child. And when his audience were listening with rapt attention, whilst tears glistened in the eyes of some, He turned quickly on them, and said, "God is just like that, only as much more delicate, and tender, and responsive, as his ways are higher than your ways." It seems as if the Lord loves us to rise heavenwards from the commonplaces of our homes, and as each tiny incident transpires, to say to ourselves, "This is a little snatch of the love of God; a clue to the labyrinth of his infinite nature; a glimpse through an aperture, small as a pin-prick, into his very heart. Yea, our heavenly Father would do much more than this." And the Apostle Paul brings out the same idea, when he tells us that every fatherhood gets its meaning and value from God, as torches lit from the sun (Eph. 3:15).

Sometimes it was directly.--He would point to sparrows lying for sale in the market, of which two were sold for a farthing, and five for two farthings, one being thrown into the bargain, and He would say, "You see how little men think of one sparrow; but it cannot fall to the ground without your Father." Admire, said He, your Father's taste; He clothed these flowers. Mark, said He, your Father's care; He provides for these birds, winging their flight overhead. Behold, said He, this little child; its angel beholds my Father's face.

Here are some of the direct statements He made: The Father is perfect in his forgiving love (Matt. 5:48); He knows what things ye need (John 6:8); He is merciful, and longs to give you the kingdom (Luke 6:36); He sees in secret, and will most certainly reward (Matt. 6:4); He is the Husbandman of souls (John 15:1); his hand is great enough to hold all his sheep, and to keep them safely (John 10:29). Living in the heart of God, and between the heart of God and man, He was continually telling men what He saw there (John 8:38).

It was also by his life.--His life was one long denial of his intrinsic glory; as we are called upon to deny our fallen evil selves. And why? Why did He refuse to speak his own words, to do his own deeds, to follow the promptings of his own will? (John 12:49-50; 5:19; 6:38; 8:28). The reason is to be found in his intense desire that the Father should shine through his human life; that the glory of God might be thrown on the canvas of mortal flesh; that the Deity might be translated into the familiar speech of men. So, when Philip asked Him to show the Father, He answered him in amazement, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). In his life, and especially in his death, Jesus showed what meaning was hidden in his Father's name. To understand these things is to see stars invisible to the naked eye, and to drink draughts further up the stream than is granted to others.

And there is here a deep lesson, too; whatever the name Father was to Jesus, that the name Jesus should be to us. It is in that name we pray. Through that name the Comforter descends. By that name we are called. On that name believing we have life. And we are chosen vessels to bear it. We have not only to hold it fast; we are called upon to declare it. By lip and life, by precept and example, by what we say and what we are, we are called upon to lift up treasure after treasure from the unsearchable riches concealed in the sweet name Jesus, until the appetites of men are whetted with a strong zest, and they are attracted to Him; as the Queen of Sheba was to Solomon by the report which reached her in her own land. "The Name" was the common epithet for Christianity in its earliest days (Acts 2., 3., 4., R.V.).

## **II. THE EFFECT OF CHRIST'S DECLARATION TO HIS FATHER'S NAME.**

It closed his mouth in self-vindication.--He stood there in that Jewish court charged with Sabbath-breaking. There were many grounds on which He might have based his claim to be exonerated of any heinous crime; but He forbore to use them. He expressly refused to establish his right to act on his own motion, or the prompting of his own will. "If I bear witness of Myself, my witness is not true" (John 5:31). It would almost appear that He thought that He would have been false to his mission, if He had spoken a word on his own behalf.

It stayed Him from summoning witnesses.--He could have summoned into that court John from the dungeon, where he was lying; and the Jews would hardly have been able to refuse his testimony (John 5:33). He could have summoned the long lines of healed

ones, who had been the subjects of his miraculous power (John 5:36). He could have summoned page after page, and line after line of the writings of Moses (John 5:46). But He only touched on these things very lightly; as if He mentioned the names of his witnesses, and then refused to subpoena them. And this was his dread, that the attention of men should be diverted from his Father to Himself. And as He took every opportunity to reveal his Father, so here, with no thought of Himself, He set Himself to his wonted task. In utter self-oblivion, in distinct refusal to come in his own name, in passionate eagerness that men should understand the great ocean, God, by this creek which had run up into a human life, He said, "I am come in my Father's name."

But in doing this, He has set up the best vindication of Himself. He refused to vindicate Himself; but his vindication of God is the strongest proof that He had been from all eternity in the bosom of the Father. He lived to reveal God; but in doing so He best revealed Himself. He refused honour from all but from God alone; and such honour has come to Him, that heaven rings with the acclaim, "Worthy art Thou to receive, honour."

So it is ever. If you love your life, you lose it. If you lose your life for his sake, you find it. We are too careful of our reputation and standing and honour, and what men say and think. Oh for that divine self-forgetfulness, that self-effacement, that self-oblivion, which finds its one all-sufficient aim in making men think better of Christ, without realizing that there is a backward reflex result in the vindication of the faithful servant. Anything which reflects light shows that it is itself polished.

### III. CHRIST'S POSTHUMOUS REVELATION OF THE FATHER'S NAME.

NOTICE these wondrous words : "The time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father" (John 16:25). And again, "I will declare it" (John 17:26). These passages can only point on to his post-resurrection ministry, when, through the Holy Spirit, He continued the teaching which in his earthly life He had commenced (Acts 1:2). It is of this ministry, also, that He speaks by the mouth of his servant, saying: "I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee" (Ps 22:22; He 2:12).

Whenever in a congregation of the saints, there is an outburst of genuine song, you may detect the voice of Jesus singing with them, and identifying Himself with it. And He still teaches us by mystic influences and infallible tokens the deeper meaning of the Fatherhood of God, leading us, not to anything outside the boards of the Bible, but to a deeper appreciation of what is there. So also He will do for ever.

O souls of men, do ye not long to know the Father, to hear his voice, to feel his touch, to be canopied by his love, so that all life may be a residence in his home? It is gloriously possible, if you are really born again, for only such have the right to call God, Father, after this inner sense (John 1:12); and if you are willing to let the Master teach you some of those things which are prepared for the lovers of God, and which he reveals by his Spirit.

And as we know more of the meaning of God's Fatherhood, we shall experience more of the love of God, and of the indwelling of the Lord Jesus. In his own emphatic words He has taught us that the amount of the one will be the measure of the other; that "the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

## 8. THE FATHER'S GIFT TO THE SON

"All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."--John 6:37.

IN THESE chapters we are engaged in catching up some of the favourite thoughts and words of the Redeemer, thinking them over again, and trying, so far as we can, to look at them with his eyes and from his stand-point. And we cannot leave this marvellous chapter without accentuating an expression which comes into prominence here for the first time, but is destined to re-appear more than once or twice--that expression is, those whom the Father giveth Me. And may it be that all who read these lines shall be included in that casket of very precious jewels which the Father has given to his Son! There is nothing higher in this world or the next to which any human being can aspire.

### I. WHO ARE THEY?

We may not look into the Book of Life, and read the names written there from before the foundation of the world. One only can take that book, and break its seals, and look upon its mysterious pages. The Lamb alone, whose blood purchased each individual mentioned there, may scan its records. But it is not necessary that that book should be opened or read ere we know its contents. There is another method of ascertaining the names it records.

The verse quoted above contains an identical proposition. Its extremes may be reversed in their order, for each is the other's equivalent. And if, on the one hand, it is true that all the given ones shall come; it is also true, on the other hand, that all who come are included among the given ones. Would you know whether you are one of these? Ask yourself if you have truly come to Christ,

or believed in Him as Saviour, Friend, and King; for if you have, you may rest assured that you were included in that Divine donation, which dates from the eternity of the far past, and shall be a theme of praise in that which is to come, world without end.

This is Christianity. It does not consist in the acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God; though Christians do accept it to be such, and account it the stable foundation of their hopes. It does not consist in the belief of a creed; though Christians necessarily hold certain definite beliefs. It is not adhesion to any visible church, or body of Christians; though Christians do for the most part associate themselves together. It is coming to Christ. And it is evident from comparing the parallel clauses of the thirty-fifth verse, that coming to Him and believing in Him are one and the same thing.

To come to Christ is to lift your heart to Him; if not in prolonged prayer, yet in trustful confidence, in desire and aspiration, in mute expectancy. To come to Christ is to despair of yourself and all others, and to venture all on Him. To come to Christ is to turn your back on the sinful past, and your face towards a glimmering streak of dawn, now visible on the horizon, but destined to grow into a great light. Have you so come to Him, who, though the meekest of men, proposes Himself as the panacea for the world's ills, the bread for its hunger, the satisfaction of its need? If so, then you are certainly amongst the given ones.

Look at that stone, agitated for ages in the depths of primeval oceans, and rounded by the attrition of the currents of unnumbered centuries; or at those hills composed of the remains of infinite myriads of infinitesimal organisms, falling through the still depths of untroubled seas; or at the moon, which bears the evidence of the terrific convulsions to which she has been exposed : and, as you consider any one of these, you are almost overwhelmed by the thought of their antiquity. Yet know, O soul of man, that, before any of these were made, before the silence of eternity was broken by the first angel-voice, in the infinite azure of the immeasurable past, you were named, and passed in deed of gift by the Father to the Son. There was no surprise, therefore, when you came to the Son of Man--this had been anticipated before time began; and it was the answer of your life to the summons of the foreknowledge of God. You have come in time, but you were given in eternity.

Suppose that a geologist, amid his explorations of the traces of earth's earliest life, were suddenly to come across a slab inscribed with his own name and a prediction of the precise date of his coming. With what amazement would he scan that mysterious tablet, and with what awe recognise the Divine omniscience! He did not come because he knew that he was expected, but because of what, as he thought, were the promptings of his own sweet will; but, having come, he discovered that his advent had been long anticipated. So we come to the Saviour under a sense of sin or the stress of sorrow, unaware of any mysterious influence at work: but, having come, we find that we have been the subjects of the drawing grace of the Father (John 6:44); that the very grace to come had been given by the Father (John 6:65); and that we were included in the Father's gift, so that of us the Son could say, "Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me, and they have kept thy word."

In dealing with the unconverted, we have only to reiterate the invitation, "Come to Him." This is the one legend that stands over the doorway of the House of Mercy. But, having entered, we learn that all who enter have been given, as a flock of sheep, to the care of the Good Shepherd, whose name is branded on them, defying time and age to erase it (John 10:29; Ga 6:17).

## **II. THEIR PRIVILEGES.**

It is a marvellous list; and, as we write and read, it is through a blinding mist of tears, because we have made so little of our marvellous prerogative--ours by an inalienable right.

### **(1) They obtain Eternal Life.**

Outside this charmed circle there is existence, but no life (John 5:53). Men may live in pleasure, but they are dead while they live (1Ti 5:6). Eternal life is as much above the ordinary life of men as that in turn is above the brute's. It partakes of the nature of that world which awaits us, unseen and eternal, in those glorious ages which we are nearing with every heart-beat. So that of the regenerate it may be said that they are already the children of eternity.

Christ gives eternal life. He not only has life in Himself, but He has received from the Father authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to those whom He has given Him (John 17:2). The life which man forfeited in Eden is given back in the second Man, the Lord from heaven. He is the tree of life, to eat of whom is to become impervious to death; and no sword now turns every way to hinder us from taking and living for ever.

We cannot explain the mystery of the imparting of this eternal life; and we know as little of the life itself. We are sure that it cannot be acquired, but must be given. We are sure that life is not the result of knowledge, but knowledge the result of life. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3). We are sure that to have it is to drink draughts of blessedness with which no earthly joy can compare. And we know that by this the religion of the Bible is distinguished from all other religions whatsoever, that it provides for the communication of this life to all who believe. Whatever a man professes and knows, without this life he is no Christian; but, with this life, the humblest and weakest believer is a child of God, a member of Christ, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. And this is the life which Jesus gives to all who come to Him,

at the first moment of their coming.

## **(2) They are safe for ever.**

Notice how He reiterates this, as if to exclude the possibility of mistake. I will in no wise cast out. The Greek is very strong, "I will never, never, cast out." So great was the pressure brought to bear on the Patriarch that he was obliged, though against his will, to cast out the slave-girl and her child; and they nearly perished in the desert-wastes. But no pressure shall ever avail with Christ to cast out one who has come to Him. No matter how weak and sinful; though a wreck through sin, with only a fragment of a life to give, He will never, never, cast out. Once inside, there is no putting out. Again, He says that it is the Father's will that He should lose nothing of all that He has given (John 6:39). In fulfilment of that will, He stood forth in the garden, accosted the armed band, as their swords were flashing in the gleaming torchlight, told them that He was the object of their search, and bade them let the terror-stricken band of disciples go their way (John 18:8-9). An image this of how He stands between us and all assailants, whether they be the righteous demands of the Divine law, or the dark and malignant powers of hell. Ever like this He is inserting Himself between our enemies and ourselves; covering us with his feathers; acting as our shield and buckler; and receiving into his own royal heart the blows meant for our worthless selves. We cannot be lost, unless we be very Judases, who deliberately open our hearts to admit the prince of hell (John 13:26; John 17:12).

And to make assurance doubly sure, the Lord speaks of those whom the Father had given Him, as enclosed not only in his own hand, but also in the grasp of his Father's hand (John 10:29). There we lie within the double safeguard: first of the hand of the Son of Man, and then of that of the Eternal Father. No member of his body can be amputated. No sheep of his flock can be torn by the lion of the pit. No Jonah shall be cast out to lighten the ship of the Church. We are kept by One who neither slumbers nor sleeps, but guards his flock with ceaseless vigilance; exercising his gracious oversight, not by an iron restraint which we cannot resist, but by a sweet persuasiveness of love from which we do not wish to escape (John 17:11, 12).

## **(3) They are the subjects of his intimate solitude.**

For these He gives his flesh and blood to be meat and drink indeed (John 6:54). To these He gives choice revelations of his Father's name (John 17:6); and passes on the very words which He receives fresh and living from his Father's voice (John 17:8). These He leads into a certain and settled belief in his Divine mission (John 17:8). For these He specially prays, excluding at times the very world from his thought, that He may concentrate all his attention on their interests (John 17:9). For these He prognosticates a unity like that between Himself and the Father. Concerning these He wills that they may be with Him where He is, so as to behold his glory, and to receive those further communications concerning the name of God which shall lead to their fuller reception of the love of God, through the untold ages of the hereafter (John 6:24-26). Oh, destiny of surpassing wonder! Oh, mystery of love! Oh, rapture of delight! And does all this hang on our coming to Jesus? Who then will delay? Ah, purblind race, to hesitate, and miss privileges so exalted, bliss so supreme!

## **(4) They shall be raised up at the last day.**

That expression, the last day, was frequently on his lips (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48). It is an indefinite expression for those final scenes in which the history of our race is to be consummated through resurrection and judgment. Our Lord does not discriminate between the successive scenes in the last great act; but bulks the whole together, leaving the Holy Spirit to show the various stages through later writers.

It is, however, noticeable how much stress He lays on the Resurrection as essential to the completeness of his work on behalf of those who come to Him. Four times in this discourse He reiterates the assertion (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54). It is not enough to impart eternal life. That would bless the spirit, but leave the body untouched. And the Saviour will not rest until the whole of our complex nature shares the emancipation and blessing of his salvation. A transfigured manhood and a glorified body must be the crown of his work for his own; and so, by his mighty power, He will raise us up in the likeness of his glory, and make us sharers of his royal and exalted state (Php 3:21).

It seems incredible, and yet it must be so. Nothing less can explain those mysterious yearnings which thrill within our hearts, and which, unless the structure of our nature is in this single particular abortive, must have their satisfaction. And nothing less will undo the devil's masterpiece of mischief, and bring glory to God out of it all.

But in speaking thus of the given ones, let it not be forgotten that they are given, not for their enjoyment, but for service. The disciples to whom our Lord so often referred under this designation, were the first preachers, teachers, workers, and martyrs of his church. To them, more than to any others, are due the sacred Scriptures of the New Testament, and the structure of the Church. And if we be in the same category, we must never forget, that though we are not of the world as to our calling, yet we are in the world for ministry; and that we have been given to the Saviour to be allied with Him in the service of men, He fulfilling through us the purposes on which He set his heart, and we sharing with Him the travail of his soul, and his ardent, patient, undiscouraged toil.

## 9. THE BREAD WHICH GIVES AND SUSTAINS LIFE

"As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me."--John 6:57.

THIS verse may fairly be said to be the pivot around which our Lord's words about Himself revolve. It certainly gives the secret of his inner life. And it excites our deepest wonder as we read it over and over, trying vainly to explore and understand its wealth of significance. It furnishes a clue also to the interpretation of those other words with which He met the devil, on his first assault, and told him that "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." But here He takes a further step, and says that He lives not only by the words of God, but by God Himself.

And there is a further interest in this verse, that it not only affords the clue to the inner life of the Son of Man, but contains an admonition for each one of us to do as He did; exercising towards Himself the same dependence of spirit and attitude as he did towards his Father.

There was a sense, of course, in which, as the Second Person in the Holy Trinity, all power was his in heaven and on earth. But of this, to use the expressive phrase of the Apostle, "He emptied Himself" (Phil 2:7), and voluntarily took up a life of momentary dependence on his Father; living on his plan, by his strength, for his glory; losing Himself utterly in his all-sufficiency, and appealing to Him in every episode and emergency of his daily life. His spirit was as dependent on Him as his body was on bread; and clung to Him as the vine to the trellis-work on which it is reared. Such is the character of the life which He bids us live towards Himself. "He that eateth Me shall live by Me."

### I. OUR LORD AS BREAD.

We might discover many ingenious analogies to please the fancy and delight the mind, but be diverted from the main conception pressed on us, with repeated emphasis, in this discourse.

Bread contains life.--It is made of fine flour, but in the grinding of the flour the life-germs of the wheat are not destroyed, and it is their presence which makes bread the life of our life, the true fuel of our fire. In bread, the life of nature, that living principle which underlies all vegetable growth, and which is due to the direct operation of the living God, is reduced to such a form that it can conveniently become the raw material out of which we weave the texture of our being. And in the human nature of the Lord Jesus there is stored the very life of God. "As the Father hath life in Himself, He gave to the Son to have life in Himself"; so that the Son has brought to our world, incarnated in his wondrous nature, the underived, infinite, and ever-blessed life of the Eternal.

It is the presence of life in bread which causes it to sustain physical life; it is the presence of life in the words of the Bible which renders it a book for all ages and of endless application; it is the presence of life in Jesus Christ which makes Him the food of men. Harken to his majestic words : "I am the life"; "I am the Resurrection and the Life"; "I am the living One" (John 14:6; 11:25; Rev 1:18).

Bread is all-sufficient for life.--It contains in itself all the elements needed for nutrition. Though a man have an unlimited supply of flesh, he cannot find in such a diet, however plentiful, certain qualities required to build up his frame. But on a bread-diet man will thrive; and he will thrive in proportion to the number of original elements left when the processes of its preparation are complete. Nor is it otherwise with Jesus. In Him there is everything that we need "for life and godliness." He is a hiding-place in a storm of wind; a covert from the tempest; rivers of water in drought; the shadow of a great rock in scorching heat. For the polluted, He is purity; for the irritable, He is patience; for the faint, He is courage; for the weak, He is strength; for the ignorant, He is wisdom. God, who knew the needs of our bodies, stored all nutritive qualities in the corn for us to assimilate as we need. And knowing the needs of our spirits, He stored all the elements required for our spiritual nutrition in our blessed Lord, leaving us to appropriate them as we will.

We cannot understand that wonderful inner mechanism, in virtue of which each part of our nature comes to the bread as soon as eaten, and carries off from it the special particles it requires. But we may all learn the lesson of their participation, and take to ourselves just those things in the blessed Lord which we want most.

Bread must be appropriated ere it becomes life-giving.--However much bread lies around, it avails not to appease hunger, or to do its work of nutrition, unless it is masticated and digested. And what digestion is to food, assimilating it with our bodies, that devout and loving meditation on the words and life and work of the Lord Jesus is to our spirits. By the one process there is brought about a union between our bodies and the bread; by the other a union between our spirits and the risen Jesus. In the one we extract the principle of physical life from bread; in the other the principle of spiritual life from the Lord of life.

No figure can unfold the meaning of all this. The only true clue is to be found in the personal experience of believers. They know what is meant, though they cannot tell the art of it to others. But it is a living fact with them, that by turning hearts and thoughts towards Jesus they are able to get strength to suffer and act in ways which, as they look back on them, appear almost past

believing. O weak and suffering ones, the greater your need, the more imperative the necessity to eat his flesh! Deliberate eating and mastication are essential to good health; but not less so, after a spiritual sort, to all who would live in soul-health before God.

Yet we may illustrate what feeding on Christ is. A whole family may be fed by the words, and gentleness, and patience, of a single invalid, who thinks herself useless lumber. A generation of young men may be fed by the heroism, or intellect, or example of some chosen leader. An expedition may feed, through long privation and bitter disappointments, on the undaunted courage and inspiring hope of some chivalrous captain. A nation may feed on the deeds or words of a Pitt, a Fox, or a Wellington. And so, in the higher sphere, we may all feed our spirits on Him who offers Himself as the true Bread of man.

The great need for us all is to feed more constantly on Christ. We are so fitful and irregular in our dealings and fellowship with Him. We do not sufficiently "handle the Word of Life." We pray in a kind of despairing way for help, but do not take Him by acts of assimilating, appropriating faith; going forth from fellowship with Him, not gauging by our emotions the amount of benefit received, but by the faith which knows that it cannot look to Christ for aught, without receiving that and more also.

But there are times in every life when, all unexpectedly and unannounced, there steals into our hearts some rich experience of the love and presence of Jesus. It is sent by One who forecasts a coming trial, and prepares us to meet it as He did; who gave his Apostles a rich banquet and an evident token of his power, ere He thrust them forth with his own hand into the very heart of the storm, which was even then gathering about the hills. They had been ill-prepared to meet the toils of that arduous night, had they not been previously so well fed by their Master's royal bounty. And often amid their perils they must have cheered each other by recalling their Master's power. Surely He who brake the loaves into food for thousands could hush the storm into a calm! God sends no crews to sea without first provisioning them. The miracle of the feeding of the multitudes preceded the terror of the storm.

## **II. THE TEACHING OF THE MANNA.**

The manna, of course, contained all the elements of true bread; but there was this peculiarity in it, that it was not produced by any natural process, nor did it grow from the soil of earth: as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." How it came, and when, no one knew; but each morning, beneath the hoar frost, round about the camp, lay the small round thing which angels might have made their food, and which heaven had dropped for the sustenance of the chosen hosts.

This is the food to which our Lord specially alludes. For purity and sweetness and sufficiency, the manna was a fitting emblem of Himself; but much more, because it came down, as He had done, from heaven (John 6:32, 33, 38, 42, 50, 51, 58).

What a marvellous tribute is here to the heavenly origin of man! His nature is fallen and degraded; but it refuses to be satisfied with anything less than that which comes down from heaven. Men try to content the hunger of their souls by husks from the swine trough and garbage from the dog-kennel, but in vain. And the fact that man, of all the living things on this earth, fails to find his satisfaction in the products of earth, proves that his origin must be sought outside the bounds of the earth-sphere. He whose nature craves heavenly food must himself be of heavenly origin. And God who made him what he is could not fail to provide the nature which He has given with the food of its native sphere.

There was, therefore, special reason why our Lord so repeatedly affirmed that He came down from heaven. He was something more than a son of man. His body might be an earthen vessel, but it held a heavenly treasure. He came down from heaven, and in those words lie the glory of his pre-existence, and the mystery of his incarnation. He came from God, and went to God. Heaven was his home, as, indeed, it had been the creation of his power in ages that lie beyond time's bourne or human vision.

## **III. LIFE-GIVING THROUGH DEATH.**

It is impossible for any one illustration to convey all God's thoughts to us. And though bread is only possible through the death of myriads of ears of wheat, yet this is not the primary thought which bread suggests to us. And, therefore, to emphasize the truth, that the power to communicate life can only be acquired through death, our Lord speaks of the bread which He would give, as his flesh, which He would give for the life of the world. Obviously flesh is that which has passed through death.

These are the words that proved so great a stumbling-block to some of his disciples. They said it was a hard saying, and they would not hear it. It was distasteful to them to hear their Master speak of an inevitable death, instead of the thrones of glory on which they had set their hearts. "From that time forth many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." How little did they realize that the crown is only reached by the path of the cross, and that the only life which can be communicated is that which has passed through the grave! There is an evident allusion in these words to that approaching death, which was never far from our Saviour's thoughts, the death of propitiation and atonement. But He did not fail to see that what He was to suffer would be as the breaking of the shrine to let forth the imprisoned spirit of life to bless the world.

Death and resurrection and ascension must precede Pentecost. He must first descend, if He would afterwards ascend to fill all hearts, all lives, all worlds, with the aroma and power of his endless life. The life He had before his death was fair, but not

communicable; that which he won in death and its defeat is fairer still, and capable of being given to all who hear and obey his invitation to come.

Doubly precious then is that life which He has given, and gives in unceasing supplies to those who feed on Him in loving lowly trust! It is a life which is death-proof; which has passed through Hades unscathed; which has acquired in the ordeal a virtue that renders it unique; and which, whilst it deals death to all that is of the flesh, enters us to abide, and to lift us to share his glorious life and endless reign.

#### IV. THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE BREAD.

How significant the lesson of the miracle which served as the text for this discourse! It was the Passover at Jerusalem; but He had kept a royal Passover on those hillsides which teemed with spiritual significance. To do all things decently and in order (John 6:10); to begin each meal by giving thanks (John 6:11); to expect something more than the bare necessities of life at the hands of God (John 6:11); to guard against waste (John 6:12); to learn that giving is the true means of increase (John 6:13); these and other lessons were taught, as the wolds and vales were being carpeted with the first sweet green of spring.

But two lessons stood out conspicuously--first, that there was enough for all; and secondly, that the fainting crowds must be fed through the ministry of his disciples. "He distributed to his disciples, and the disciples to them which were set down."

In all our Lord's miracles there is a marvellous economy of power. The servants must fill the water-pots with water before He makes it wine. Jairus and the mother must give their daughter something to eat when the Master has given her back to them. Others must roll away the stone, though only He can throw the life-giving word into the tomb. So here. He used the lad's loaves and fishes as the basis of the miracle; and, instead of distributing the food by miraculous agency, He passed it through the hands of his disciples, giving them a memorable share in the joyous work.

Nor is it otherwise to-day. There is enough in our dear Lord to meet the demands of all that are in heaven and on the earth; no man, or woman, or child, need go unfed. But if the precious Bread of Life, for lack of which men are famishing, is to be brought to them, it can only be by our hands, who stand around the Lord as a kind of inner circle. Oh, shame on us that we are so apt to feed ourselves, neglectful of the cry of the perishing; and that we content ourselves with giving again and again to the same few ranks immediately around us, till they are surfeited, and the rest left without a crumb! What wonder that we cease to enjoy the provisions we misuse; and that they fail before our eyes, leaving no basketfuls of fragments for coming days!

Say not that your knowledge of Christ is too small and fragmentary to be of any avail. Take to Him; beneath his touch a wondrous transformation will ensue; and, as you give away your all, you will find it grow beneath your hand, because it has passed from his hand to yours, and the slender provision, which threatened to be too little for yourself, shall avail for multitudes.

## 10. THE WORDS OF JESUS

"Thou hast the words of eternal life."--John 6:68.

IT WAS a touching question which elicited this reply. Only the night before it had been proposed by some enthusiastic followers that they should take Him by force, and make Him a king. And if our Lord had been the mere enthusiast that some men dare to term Him, and had vacillated for only a moment, the standard of revolt had been erected amid the littered fragments of the supper, and a movement had been started before which the Government of Rome must have trembled.

But our Lord had no ambition to be a literal successor of David and the kings. His kingdom was not of this world. He had told the devil so, at the beginning of His ministry; and now He held steadfastly to his plan. In a few moments the revolt was quelled. His disciples were forcing their little boat towards the other side, beneath frowning skies, and in the teeth of a rising storm. And the crowds suddenly missed Him, as He sped away towards the mountain heights, for a night of fellowship with his Father.

On those lonely heights He perceived the position in which He was placed. He was becoming surrounded by a motley crowd, who came to Him for what they could get, and hoped that He would serve the fierce passions of their revenge. It was needful clearly to undeceive them, and reveal the real character of his mission; and this must be done at once--to-morrow, though at the cost of his popularity. Henceforth his way would be as difficult as that of the tiny craft, which, when the moonlight broke out now and again, He could see as a black speck on the turbulent waters beneath.

The following morning, on the further shore, saw a renewal of the excitement of the preceding evening. So our Lord withdrew into the friendly shelter of a synagogue, and spoke the discourse of this chapter, the most deeply spiritual of any of his discourses hitherto; and it changed the whole aspect of his career.

We all know the interest given to the record of a speech by the parentheses, which tell us how it was received. And we are not left without symptoms of the effect of these searching words on the crowds around Him. In John 6:41, the men who, a few hours

before, wished to crown Him, murmured at Him. In John 6:52, they strove among themselves. In John 6:60, many of his disciples, as they listened, said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" In John 6:66, many of them went back and walked no more with Him. And now, as the shades of evening were beginning to fall, the synagogue was almost empty; and the Lord was left alone with the little company of the twelve, who had been the sorrowful witnesses of the shattering of their Master's popularity, and of the fabric of their own ambitions. He looked round on them, and put the infinitely pathetic question, "Will ye also go away?" And it elicited from Peter, the ready spokesman of the rest, a reply which showed that in those very words, which others had felt so startling and terrible, he at least had found fuel for that inner fire which the Master had kindled by the breath of his lips.

Yes; the words of Jesus are enough to prove that He is the Son of the living God. In their cool depths weary souls bathe; through their pure glow, the dark passages of life are irradiated with heavenly lustre; and by their fascination our wayward hearts are closely bound to Him who spake as never man spake. As He speaks down the long corridors of the ages, his words float towards us with undiminished beauty and force; thrilling, soothing, teaching us, and shedding light on God, and life, and death, and the world to come.

#### **His words are gracious.**

So the crowds found them, as they listened in breathless silence to his first sermon in his highland home (Luke 4:22). And that tender grace has not passed away from them; as the fragrance exhales from flowers after they have long been gathered. They still distil as dew on tender grass, and drop as rain on mown lawns. Disciple as He was in the school of sorrow, He perfectly acquired the art of speaking words in season to them that are weary, words that heal the broken-hearted, and comfort the mourner, and bid the accused go to sin no more. Well may we look up from his words, which are as music issuing from an AEolian harp, into his face and say, "Thou art fairer than the children of men, grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever."

#### **His words were authoritative.**

So the people said as they broke up into little groups, and went wondering away from the mountain of the Beatitudes, when the spell of the speaker's voice was still fresh upon their memories (Mt. 7:28, 29). He did not stay to prove the truth of what He said. That was entirely needless, for his words were self-evidencing. They were as incapable of demonstration as the axioms of Euclid; but they were as obviously true. The mind of man might not have been able to elaborate them for itself; but it instantly perceived their truthfulness when presented. Do you try to prove that a coin is genuine gold, when it rings? Do you need to prove that the strain of music which softly steals through Gothic arches is beautiful, when it entrances the listening soul? Do you need to prove that the friend is sincere, when you can detect the rhythm of his heart-throbs? And there is less need to prove the words of Jesus : the soul knows that what He says is true; it has within itself that which assents to every syllable; from its very base there rises a deep Amen, like the boom of the sea-waves in a hollow cavern far below the brink of the cliffs. And this constitutes their authority. Their authority is not in the reason, but in the soul.

#### **His words make the deepest truths current coin.**

The world's teachers have hedged themselves about with a narrow circle of disciples, leaving the masses to take their chance. The Pharisee says that the people which does not know the law are cursed (John 7:49). Plato says that it is not easy to find the Father of all existence; and when He is found it is impossible to make Him known to all. Celsus charges this against Christianity, that woollen manufacturers, shoemakers, and curriers had become its zealous supporters. But it is the glory of Jesus that He disembowelled truth's deepest mines of their golden ore, and minted it into common coin, which He threw in lavish handfuls among men. Only when they refused to hear did He hide his meaning in dark sentences; but wherever there was willingness to receive, He was prodigal to bestow. Yea, He set Himself to enwrap his teachings in the fascinating story, the pithy proverb, the sharp antithesis, the methods of speech dear to the crowds of every age, never lowering the truth by its dress, but hallowing the dress, just as common articles are counted heirlooms because once used by the hands of a prince.

All through his ministry, the common people heard Him gladly. The publicans and sinners drew near to hear Him. The officers of the Sanhedrim beneath the power of his words were unable to arrest Him. Thousands would gather in the desert or on the hills, forgetful of all beside, and willing to stand the live-long day to listen to lips which dropped with honey. His words swayed the multitudes as vines swing in the autumn air.

#### **His words are life.**

The Master said so Himself, and so did his Apostle (John 6:63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68). They gave life as they were spoken in the ear of death. Those who were in the graves of sensual and sinful indulgence heard Him and came forth; just as those who are in the literal graves of mother earth shall do one day. As the tiny torch of life burns in every seed, so does the life of God Himself tremble in each word of Jesus. "Cast forth thy word," says Carlyle, "into the ever-living, ever-moving universe; it is a seed-germ that can never die; unnoticed to-day, it will be found flourishing, perhaps as a banyan grove, perhaps as an oak-forest, after a thousand years." How true this is of the words of Jesus! Sow them in the scantiest, poorest soil, and leave them; you will be surprised to see

the result in the multiform manifestations of holy and useful life.

Those who most ponder Christ's words are most conscious of the life that is in them. They are the best witnesses to verify the repeated references of this chapter to the living bread, given for the life of the world, of which, if a man eats, he shall live for ever. Oh that each reader would acquire the precious habit of feeding on these words, till they become in actual enjoyment both spirit and life!

### **They are the words of the Father.**

It is very beautiful to notice how constantly our dear Lord refused to take credit for his words. He insisted that his doctrine was not his own, but his by whom He had been sent (John 7:16). He spake what He had heard, and had been taught, and had seen with his Father (John 8:26, 28, 38). He said that his Father had given Him a commandment as to what He should say and speak, by which He was absolutely guided. As the Father said unto Him, so He spoke (John 12:49, 50). His word was not his; but the Father who dwelt in Him spoke through his yielded nature (John 14:24). He simply passed on words as they had been given to Himself (John 17:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14).

What a condemnation and a lesson are here! The one, that we have spoken so many of our own words; the other, that we should henceforth wait more humbly and resolutely on Him, not seeking enticing words of man's wisdom, but awaiting for the word from his lips, and warning men from Him.

To whom then shall we go if we leave Him? To Agnosticism with his negations? to Ritualism with its outward pomp? to the religions of the world, which are waning in the lands of their birth, because no longer able to satisfy the cravings of men? To turn to these would be to leave the fountain of living crystal for the broken cisterns, which, at the best, can hold but a few drops of brackish rain-water. No; we will not go away, but only ask that He would still speak to us the words of eternal life.

## **11. RIVERS OF LIVING WATER**

"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive."--John 7:37-39.

WHAT MUSIC there is in these words! We are transported to the banks of a mighty river, down the bed of which the waters are ever hurrying to the sea. There is very little sound. The great volume of water moves majestically and silently onward, with now and again a musical ripple on its broad and waveless bosom. Flowing from mountain ranges where melting snows feed its springs; replenished from a hundred rills leaping the crags in a veil of mist; purified by being torn and combed in its rush over many a cataract--that river is the perpetual emblem of fertility, freshness, abundance, and sufficiency of supply.

But this is not all. The Lord is not content with speaking of a river. He speaks of rivers. It is as if He bade us add the Missouri to the Mississippi, and to these the Amazon, and to these the Orinoco, and to these the Ganges, and the Danube. River added to river; stream to stream; torrent to torrent; and all to set forth the freshness and the abundance of the life that should stream from each thirsty soul, who, having come to Him, the Rock, should in turn become a rock; and, having received out of his fullness, should pass it on to a drought-smitten world.

Do you, my reader, know anything of this? Is your life comparable to a river, nay, to many rivers of holy influence? In the first place, do you know what it is to be satisfied? and in the second place, do you know what it is to communicate to others what you are receiving from the risen Lord? If not, are you not living below your privileges, and would it not be wise to do what the present writer did on one memorable occasion--put your finger on these words, and claim that, in all their heights, and depths, and widths, and lengths of meaning, they should be realized? The world would soon cease to be thirsty if only each believer were to become like one of the ancient rivers of Paradise, which was parted into four heads.

### **I. THE SPEAKER.**

To look at, there was nothing specially remarkable. Very meek and lowly was the King, clad in the simple homespun of the country, perhaps not knowing where He would sleep that very night. Often hungry, because the money was exhausted in the wallet, and thirsty beneath that hot Syrian sun. And yet He speaks of Himself as able to quench the thirst of men, from Himself.

It would seem as if He overleapt the intervening weeks, and thought of Himself as already back in his Father's glory, glorified and sitting on that throne from which the river of the water of life is ever descending to refresh and save. That river is Himself.

Christ is Christianity. In this He differs from all other teachers. They talk about truth, and set themselves to invent vast systems of philosophy which men must master. But our Lord has one panacea for all woes, all needs, all the infinite want of the spirit--and it is

Himself. He stood and cried, as if the urgency of his spirit would brook no further restraint, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me."

Do we always believe this? We are conscious of almost infinite needs; we thirst and pine for happiness, for rest, for peace, for that indefinable satisfaction which seems so perfectly set forth in the sweet, deep word love; we turn from side to side for an answer; for a moment we think we have found it, as we see not far away some rock-hewn cistern, and make for it, only to find that it is broken and will hold no water. Human love fails to quench our thirst, though we drink deeply and widely of its stores. But Jesus is all-sufficient. Rutherford's most rapturous words never told a thousandth part of all His sufficiency and fullness.

He is the Sun; the heart that has learnt the art of basking in His beams may live without human love. He is the Ocean; the life which is open to his fullness is preserved from ebb or fluctuation, and is independent of passing showers, with their pattering raindrops. He is the Man; the Man of men, in whom all the strength of the strong and the sweetness of the lovable dwell in unstinted and infinite abundance: and the nature which has acquired the habit of living in union with Him can exist amid the failure and disappointment of all earthly friendships. All the fullness of God-head is in his vast and multitudinous nature.

Worlds cannot satisfy souls, any more than cart-loads of earth could fill the mouth of the Amazon. Alexander, the conqueror of the world, weeps with discontent, because there is nothing left to conquer. But Christ is always a brimming river; nay, a fountain whose drops are oceans, and whose jets are rivers; and whosoever will bare the soul to Him again and again, not trying to feel satisfied, but trusting for satisfaction, will find longings subside, the ache of disappointment anodyned, the fever-thirst slaked. Try it, O brother man!

## II. THE INVITATION.

"If any thirst." "Any!" Those who are grimed with sin. "Any!" Those who have no claim but their exceeding need. "Any!" Those whom all the world and the Church spurn. "Any!" Publicans and sinners; outcasts and dying malefactors; persecutors and procrastinators. Richard Baxter used to say that, if his name had stood on this page, he would have feared that it referred to some other who bore it; but, since the Lord said any, he knew that even he was welcome. The one and only qualification is thirst.

Coming to Him is believing on Him. It is the touch of the soul and the Saviour. It is contact; the opening of the inner life to his entrance; the willingness to be possessed; the clinging to Him, as the drowning sailor to the outstretched hand or floating spar. With no emotion, or effort at self-improvement, or endeavour to adjust the circumstances of the outward life, lift your eyes from this page to Him and say, "O Lamb of God, I come!" And instantly you are at the land whither you go. As you come on the earth side, He comes on the heaven side; you go to the utmost bourne of the visible, He comes to the same spot from the bourne of the invisible; and on the borderland you meet Him. Perhaps it were true to say that his arrival there is the attraction which, without your realizing it, draws you to arise and go forth to Him. The sun attracts sparks; the earth, asteroids; the ocean, rivers; and Jesus, souls. To answer that attraction, however feebly, is to come.

## III. THE SUPPLY.

"Thus spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive." During his earthly life, our Lord supplied so far as possible what each disciple needed by his personal care and oversight. He knew each sheep by name; anticipated by prayerful sympathy the temptations of each; and sought to supply the need of each out of his royal bounty. But even then, as an external presence, He was not able to meet and satisfy the inner restlessness and craving of their hearts. How much less could He do it for them, or for us, when He became invisible and exalted to the right hand of power! But this lack is more than compensated for by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus ascended He received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. And then a new era broke on the world. Before the Ascension, the Spirit of God had rested upon men, fitting them for service; henceforth He was to be in them. This is the glory of our present dispensation, the crown of redemption, the climax of our Saviour's work. "He abideth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:16, 17).

In Regeneration the Holy Spirit does literally indwell the believer. His life may be stunted, dwarfed, repressed, as plants in a sickly atmosphere, and as streams choked with the debris brought down from the hills; but it can never again be lost. "He abides for ever." But what does He bring, save the life of Jesus? These two are identical. When we are strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. If the Spirit of Christ be in us, Christ Himself is in us. It is a mistake to dis sever these two. They are one.

This, then, is the sum of the whole matter. When weary, thirsty souls go to Jesus, He gives them instant relief, by giving them his Holy Spirit; and in that most blessed of all gifts, He Himself glides into the eager nature. He does not strive nor cry; there is no sound as of a rushing storm of wind, no coronet of flame; whilst men are watching at the front door to welcome Him with blare of trumpet, He steals in at the rear, unnoticed; but, in any case, He suddenly comes to his temple, and sits in its inner shrine as a

refiner and purifier of the sons of Levi. Jesus Himself is the supply of our spirits, through the Holy Ghost, whom He gives to be within us and with us for ever.

#### **IV. CONDITIONS OF RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

He was not given to be an indwelling life till Jesus was glorified: Because the expiation of sins must precede our reception of the new life.--We must be justified before we can be sanctified. The prodigal must be reconciled with his father before he can sit at the table arrayed in festal robes, and admitted to the highest privileges that the home can yield. The second Adam must undo the results of the sin of the first Adam before He may give to his posterity the most priceless gift of heaven.

Because the power to give the Spirit could only be the reward of accomplished service.--It was only when our Lord had positively regained his Father's throne, standing where He did ere He started forth to the work of our redemption, that He had really finished the work which had been entrusted Him to do. And it was only then, when not only the Atonement of Calvary, but the Resurrection, the teachings of the forty days, and the Ascension leading captivity captive, had been accomplished, that He was able to claim the perfected reward which had glittered before his eyes amid the shame and sorrow of the cross.

Because the glory of the Lord Jesus must be perfected ere it could be communicated.---There is a sense in which, as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, our Lord had all glory, underived, inexhaustible, and unchanging. But we are speaking of Him now as the wondrous Being who has taken human nature into eternal union with the Divine; who has, so to speak, created in death and resurrection a new unit of being in the universe of God; who has learned obedience by the things that He suffered, that He might be perfectly qualified to be a Priest. And it is surely right and true to affirm that, though, as regards Himself, there was nothing to desire, nothing to add; yet, as regards his office and the communication of his glorified life to others, He could not become all that He needed to be, and is, except through death and resurrection and ascension. But so soon as these were accomplished, He was able, as the perfected second Adam, to bestow his crowned and victorious life on men, and instantly the Spirit was given. The Spirit of Christ came to bring the life of Christ into our hearts; but He could not do it till that life was perfected in ascension glory. This done, the Spirit came.

There are some practical suggestions here for those who are longing for the Holy Spirit's fullness.

##### **(1) Exercise faith in the Lord Jesus.**

Do not concentrate your thoughts on the Blessed Comforter; but on Him who is exalted to bestow Him, and who constantly says, "I will send Him," "I will give Him to you." To receive the Spirit, we must believe in Jesus; that is, we must open our entire being to Him, expectant and believing.

##### **(2) Remember that, if you believe, you have received the Spirit.**

"The Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive." You could not believe or call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Spirit; and ever since you did these things, He has been within you. Do not then ask for a new blessing; but for more of that which you already have. Remove the silt and rubbish which have occupied his place. Put away the sins which have grieved Him. Deny self which has crowded Him out of your life. Keep your soul in an eager believing attitude towards Jesus, and He will flood you with wave on wave of spiritual power.

##### **(3) Let the Lord Jesus occupy the place where God has set Him--the throne.**

The glory of Jesus is ever connected in Scripture with the reign of Jesus. There must be an ascension and an enthronement within; all things must be put under his feet; principalities and powers must own his sway; and when we glorify Jesus in our hearts and lives, setting Him on the throne, then the Spirit fills us with successive waves of power.