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Hebrews 1:12

Thou art the same.

Thou art the same, when contrasted with nature. — The solid bases of the hills were laid in their sockets by thy hands. The blue tapestry of the sky was woven by thy fingers; and it is as easy for Thee to lay it aside and substitute new heavens as for us to lay aside a worn-out dress and take another. And as the change of dress does not affect the nature of the wearer, neither will all the changes of creation or nature affect the power of thine hand or the tenderness of thy heart. Thou art the same!

Thou art the same, when contrasted with men. — They come and go. The great ones of the past — Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah — stood with Thee for a moment on the earth, and then passed into the great silence. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Knox, wrought for Thee and with Thee, and passed away. Our own teachers and friends have not been suffered to continue by reason of death. One by one they have passed from us; but Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail!

Thou art the same, when contrasted with our own moods and impulses. — They are too fitful; like the morning dew; like the evening wind. Sometimes we feel we could die for Thee; at other times we sleep amid thy sorrows. Emotions, resolutions, methods

of thought and action, are permanent only in their changefulness. But Thou art the same — changeless and timeless, our Rock of Ages, our impregnable Fortress and Home!

This was the import of the Burning Bush which flamed out on the hillside in the dark night, but did not burn to the ground. Steadily, constantly, fiercely, the fire shone, but needed no fuel from the tree — symbol of the I AM.

Hebrews 2:17

A merciful and faithful High Priest.

The priesthood of Jesus stretches like the sky from the horizon of the past to that of the eternal future. It covers all we know of Him.

In the days that preceded his incarnation. — We are told that the priesthood of Melchizedek was made like that of the Son of God (Hebrews 7:3), from which it is clear that all the apparatus of priesthood within and without the Jewish system was some faint imagining forth of the priestly mediation and intercession of the Savior. The eternal temple was reared, the incense of intercession ascended, the sacrifice of the Lamb was slain, before the first thin spiral of smoke rose from Moriah's summit.

In the days of his earthly ministry. — At the Passover, when the High Priest had finished the sacred rites, he came forth to the people, and said "Now ye are clean." In John 15:3 Jesus addressed his disciples in the same words. His authority to forgive sins; his quick sympathy, and likeness to his brethren; his frequent prayers; his intercessions for sinners, as when He pleaded for his crucifiers; his intercessions for the tempted, as when He prayed for Peter; his intercessions for his own, as in the matchless John 17; his reference to the shedding of blood; the whole circumstances of his death — show his priestly attitude, which culminated in his passing within the veil.

In the days of the present dispensation. — The divine apostle tells us that he saw Christ clothed in a vesture to the foot, and employs this specific word for high-priestly dress. He saw Him engaged in priestly ministry; and in a subsequent vision tells us that he saw Him mingle much incense with the prayer of saints, and present them before God.

Hebrews 3:1

Consider ... Jesus.

Who are to consider Him? — "Holy brethren." Because we are the brethren of Jesus, we must consider our Brother. Because we are brethren with all, whom He brothers, we should emulate the saints of all ages in their eager gaze at Christ. We must possess the holiness without which none can see the Lord, and we must live in holy love with all who bear the name of Christ. Do you lack either of these? This is the reason why your eyes are blinded. Step out of the mist into the clear prospect:—

"A step, A single step, shall free you from the skirts Of the blind vapour, and open to your view Glory beyond all glory ever seen By waking sense or by the dreaming soul."

What right have they to consider Him? — Because they are "partakers of a heavenly calling." They have turned from the world, from the fascinations of the sin and the flesh; they are seeking the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. Surely such have a right, given them of grace, to live in daily personal vision of their King!

In what aspects should they consider Him? — As Apostle, whom God has sent out of his bosom to man, and whom man sends back to God. As Priest, who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, who bears our needs and sins and sorrows on his heart. As the Son, compared with whom Moses was but a servant. As Creator, by whom all things were made, and without whom was not anything made. As the Head of the household of those who believe. As the All-faithfull One, who will never resign his charge. Consider Jesus in each of these aspects, and rejoice in Him.

Hebrews 4:9

There remaineth therefore, a Sabbath rest for the people of God. (r.v.)

There is a rest for weary souls. — God speaks of it as his Rest. He entered it, we are told, when He had finished his work; and beheld it to be very good; and ever since the door has been standing open for the travel-stained, weary children of men to enter it. To every other creation-day there were evening and morning, but not to this; it partakes of the nature of eternity in its timeless bliss.

Let us rejoice that this rest remaineth. — Of course, the Sabbath, which was and is a type of it, could not exhaust it. And Canaan, with its sweet plains and cessation of the wilderness wanderings, could not completely fulfill it; because centuries after it had been given through Joshua, in the Psalms God spoke of yet another day, as though his rest were still future.

The rest may be a present experience. — The word "remaineth" has diverted the thoughts of commentators who have supposed it referred to heaven. There is rest, sweet rest, there. But "remaineth" means "unexhausted, unrealized, by aught which has taken

place.” The rest is for us here and now. “We which have believed do enter into rest.” Where is it? In the bosom of Christ: “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.” It is in ploughing the furrow of daily duty — “Take my yoke; ... and find rest.”

This rest is compatible with great activity. — He that enters into the Divine rest is not reduced to quietism. On the seventh day the Creator rested from creation; but He works in providence. Jesus, on the seventh day, rested from Calvary; but He pleads in heaven. Cease from your own works, after a similar fashion; abandon your restless planning and striving; by the grace of the Holy Spirit better service will be produced.

Hebrews 5:14

Senses exercised to discern good and evil.

It is difficult to exaggerate the value of the physical senses Take, for instance, that of scent. It is the means of exquisite enjoyment, conveying to us the perfume of garden or field; and it secures us against serious perils that lie in wait for our unwary footsteps. By the order of God’s providence, hurtful substances exhale noxious and forbidding odours, by reason of which we are warned from going into their close proximity.

The soul also is endowed with senses. How important a part our spiritual senses may play in the regimen of the inner life! If we are quick to discern good and evil, we may welcome the one and avoid the other with ever-increasing readiness. We may receive the blessing of the one when still afar off, and avoid the curse of the other when only threatening us.

The army which is ill served by its scouts stands a much worse chance than if it were forewarned when an attack was advancing. The foremost ranks of the foe may be over the ramparts, and engaged in the heart of the fortress, before there has been time for preparation. Oh, to detect temptation, when still it is only a thought, a suggestion, a faint shadow on the sky!

We may sharpen our senses by use. When I was in the tea-trade, my sense of touch and taste and smell became acute to discern quite minute differences. We need a similar acuteness in discerning good and evil. May our hearts become most sensitive to all that might lead to temptation, so that we may deal with the tempter in the very earliest suggestions of evil. Lord, make us quick of scent in the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:3, r.v.).

Hebrews 6:8

It is impossible to renew again to repentance, the while... (r.v., marg.)

The writer of this Epistle is eager to lead his readers from first principles to that strong meat which was befitting for those of mature growth; and, as he proceeds to do so, it was as though he were arrested by a sudden thought of some who had recently fallen away from the faith.

In the awful stress of trial which accompanied the fall of Jerusalem, the Hebrew Christians, who were still dwelling in Palestine, were strongly tempted to apostatize. Some, indeed, had done so. But can we really consider that they ever were true Christians? They went out, because they had never been truly of. They had been enlightened as to the doctrines of Christianity; but the enlightenment had been of their head rather than of their heart. They had tasted of the heavenly hopes, anticipations, and joys of the Gospel message, without really belonging to the Household of Faith. But, notwithstanding all, they had gone back.

It is impossible to renew such to repentance, whilst they go on living as they do, crucifying the Son of God by their vicious and cowardly course of action, and putting Him to an open shame. Notice that whilst, suggested by Bishop Westcott, of the margin of the R.V. It is the solution of the great difficulty which has perplexed many timid souls. The impossibility of renewal is only for those who persist in their evil ways. Abandon your sins, and God will restore you to your old place.

It cannot be too clearly emphasized that this text does not say that backsliders cannot be restored to the favor and forgiveness of God; but that they cannot be restored so long as they cling to the things which had been the sources of their declension.

Hebrews 7:16

After the power of an indissoluble life. (r.v., marg.)

This chapter is a veritable Psalm of Life. It overflows with the message of the Easter morning. Throughout its verses it is witnessed that He liveth; that He ever liveth; that He liveth after the power of an indissoluble life.

Remember all that was done to dissolve and loose it. Satan spoke to his chief captains, Sepulcher and Corruption, and bade them hold his Prisoner fast. The Sanhedrim affixed their seal, set the watch, and made the grave as secure as possible. But it was all in vain. His body could not see corruption. His life defied death. All through the Greek mythology there is the wail of infinite sorrow. Laocoon and his sons strangled by the folds of the mighty serpent: day always mastered by night: the year with its wealth of life

descending to the abyss. Strive as man might, he would be mastered at last, and primeval night reign once more. But all this is altered in Jesus. He is Priest after the power of an indissoluble life.

And, what is more, that life may be communicated to us by the Holy Spirit. It is not only true that He ever liveth; but also that because He lives, and as He lives, we shall live also. In the first creation God breathed into Adam the breath of his life, and he became a living soul; but in the second creation Christ breathes into us the spirit of his life, and our spirit is filled with a property which it had not previously, and in which the sons of men have no share. "The first man Adam became a living soul, The last Adam became a life giving spirit." "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." See to it that you deny your own life, so that his life may become evermore regnant within you.

Hebrews 8:13

In that He saith, A new covenant, He hath made the first old.

There had been a manifest decay and vanishing away of the first Tabernacle or Temple with its rites and services. At the time when these words were written there were evident symptoms of the approaching collapse of the whole system of which pious Jews had been wont to boast. But the Holy Spirit reassures their failing hearts.

It is well, He seems to say, that these should vanish from the earth; that men may be certified that the old covenant, of which they were the sign and seal, has also gone — gone never to be recalled. Thereupon, the very natural inquiry was suggested If the old covenant has decayed and vanished away, what is the agreement or arrangement under which we are living now? To this inquiry the present chapter is an answer.

Those who believe in Christ are still in covenant relationship with God. A new covenant has been set up, which indeed is as old as the everlasting hills. It is the covenant of love; the covenant which says very little of what man does, and much of the I wills of Jehovah; a covenant which was entered into between God and his Son, standing as Mediator; a covenant which has been sealed with priceless blood.

The provisions of that covenant are enumerated in the foregoing verses: that God will engrave his law on mind and heart, and take us to be his people and be our God, and remember our sins no more. As the decay of the symbols of the Old Testament indicated that it was vanishing, so the ever-fresh beauty of the supper of our Lord, as it was practiced in the first Church, witnessed to the permanence of the New Testament.

Hebrews 9:28

Unto them that look for Him shall He appear.

There is an evident parallel intended between the first and second Advent, and especially in the manner of looking for it. At the first Advent there were many who were definitely looking for and hastening to that day. Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel; and Anna spoke of the infant Lord to those who were expecting redemption in Israel. To look for the consolation and to look for the redemption were the two articles in that early creed. And presently this quiet, patient waiting broke out into the rapturous song of the Nunc Dimittis.

But all Jews were not looking for that blessed Hope, the appearance of the Grace of God. When our Lord came, the leading teacher of Judaism was Philo, and he not only had no Messianic hopes of his own, but discouraged them in other people. He conceded that there might be a return of Jewish national life; but he had no expectation of it being under the leadership of the Christ.

It has been truly remarked that this eager looking for the Advent has always been the mark of the living Church. "Ye turned," said the apostle, "unto God from idols ... to wait for his Son from heaven." And again he said, "A crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give unto me in that day; and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing."

As it was with the first Advent it shall be with the second. The Son of God will come at a time and in a manner for which men are not prepared; and only the elect, who may have been contemned and despised by the world at large, will discern Him, and go forth to meet Him in the air.

Hebrews 10:9

He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second.

The meaning of this is clear. In the old covenant the stress was laid on the outward rite; but in the new covenant, for burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin are substituted first the entire devotion and consecration of the blessed Lord to his Father's will; and next, ours in Him.

It is very noticeable that by the offering of the cross, in which the Savior's yielded will culminated, we are said to have been sanctified, consecrated, or set apart once for all (Hebrews 10:10). The thought there is, evidently, that our Savior's death has implicated us for evermore; and that his Church, whom He represented in that supreme act, is for ever pledged to be dead unto the world and sin.

But still later we learn that He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Hebrews 10:14). The change of tense surely indicates that what was accomplished for us in the purpose of God when Jesus died, must be accomplished in us by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Every time, therefore, our will is brought into more perfect union with that of God, a further step is taken towards that glorious elevation which Jesus made ours in the death of the cross.

And if you would have an incentive to this, remember how Jesus promised that all who would do the will of God should be reckoned members of the holy family (Matthew 12:46–50). Are you a member of that family? You may be, and sit only on the outer circle, for the constituent members are always altering their position towards the central Christ; now advancing towards the inner heart, now receding. Oh, see to it that you are not only within the holy circle of the will of God, but that you are near the golden centre where Jesus is seated.

Hebrews 11:40

They without us should not be made perfect.

This chapter proves that the saints of all ages are essentially one. There is a link which unites them; a thrill which passes from hand to hand around the circle. One theme for many voices; one attitude for many faces; one inspiration for many hearts. The saints that lived before the Advent and those that have lived since are one in their faith in the living God making the unseen visible, the distant near, and seeing the eternal through the transient and ephemeral.

And now heaven waits. Its joys are not complete, its rapture not full. The blessed are blessed; but there is yet a margin between what they are and what they will be — between what they enjoy, and what they may enjoy. The choir is not full, and the anthem cannot be fully rendered till our voices blend in it. There is a pause, a halt, an expectancy, an incompleteness, till we come. Your dear ones want you to be there. They have not gone far into the heart of God's bliss, but are lingering near the gate till you have joined them.

From Switzerland your friends write you to say it is perfectly beautiful, but "it will be better when you join us; we are reserving the best excursions till you arrive; we are incomplete without you; make haste." It is thus that the blessed await us. The spirit of Heaven is well represented by the courtesy of the old prophet, who would not sit down to meat with Jesse and his sons, till David, the youngest, had come thither also. And when the whole family is gathered, there will be a perfecting indeed, from which no element shall be wanting.

Oh rapture of eternal joy! We stretch out our hands in yearning desire, and doing so touch other hands reached towards ours!

Hebrews 12:22

Ye are come unto Mount Zion.

These poor Hebrew Christians, outcast from their Temple, and soon to see their beloved city vanish from the earth, were sore at heart. What a contrast was presented by the bare room in which they celebrated the simple supper and the splendid Temple with its magnificent rites! What a tiny rill their hymns were, compared with the mighty torrent of Temple psalmody! What a handful of worshippers, compared with the multitudes that congregated from all the world! Sometimes it seemed as though the contrast were unbearable.

Then said the Holy Ghost, lift up your eyes and see. Ye are not the lonely, isolated handful ye suppose. Every time you offer your prayer and sing your hymns ye are joining with the spirits of the perfected just, with numberless holy angels, and with vast multitudes in heaven and on earth who are ever adoring Christ. You climb the temple of Worship, of which the steps are prayers and the gates praise, and as you do so, on either hand go myriads of happy and holy spirits; and those surely are specially near whom you "have loved long since and lost awhile."

What special blessing these thoughts will bring to the bedridden, who for many years have not entered the courts of God's house; to the aged, and lonely, and exiled! We never worship God alone. As soon as we begin to pray, we say, Our Father which art in heaven, forgive our sins; give us our daily bread. We need not die to pass within thy gates,

O Jerusalem, city of God! Already we tread thy golden pavement, and hear the music of the waters of life, and press to our wounds the leaves of thy tree.

Hebrews 13:21

Make you perfect in every good work to do his will.

To perfect is to adjust, to put in joint, to articulate us with the living Savior. It may be described as a surgical operation. Too many of those who are in the Body of Christ are not in living articulate union with Him. Hence the writer asks that we may be properly jointed with Christ.

The Agent of this process. — The God of Peace. Let us not be afraid of Him, as though He must use some terrible anguish, some heartrending grief. He will not shrink from this, if all other methods fail; but He prefers to achieve his purpose by gentle, tender, peaceful means. He is the God of the summer evening; of the bursting spring; of the slumber of the little babe.

The Guarantee that He will perform this process. — He brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep; and surely the power which achieved that bringing again is capable of any demand that may be made on it. Will He do so much for the Shepherd, and neglect the flock? Will He give Him the victory, and forsake those for whom He won it? In bringing the Shepherd did He not pledge Himself by the most solemn sanctions to do all that needed doing for the weakest of his sheep?

The Object of this process. — He adjusts us, that all which is well pleasing in his sight may be readily fulfilled in and through our yielded natures. When the helmsman is right with the captain, the boat will naturally take the course that the captain selects. When the machinery is adjusted with the motive power, the pulse of the piston will be felt away at the furthest loom, with the smallest amount of leakage and the largest of result.

Hebrews 12:29

Our God is A Consuming Fire

WHAT comfort there is in these words! Once they only filled us with alarm: now they are the tidings of great joy.

It made a great difference, on the shores of the Red Sea, on which side of the cloud the hosts were placed. To be on the one side meant terror and dismay: "The Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians." But to be on the other side meant comfort and hope: "It was a cloud and darkness to them; but it gave light by night to these." Similarly a great difference is made by our position towards God, as to whether the words at the head of this chapter will be a comfort or a cause of anxiety. If we are against God--enemies in our mind by wicked works, sinning against His gentle, Holy Spirit--we can look for little relief in considering the majestic symbolism of the passage. But if we are on His side, sheltered under His hand, hidden in the cleft of the Rock, conscious that we are in Him that is true--then we may rejoice with exceeding great joy that "our God is a Consuming Fire."

In Scripture FIRE is the invariable symbol of God's nature and character. It was as a lamp of FIRE that the Almighty passed between the pieces of Abraham's sacrifice. It was as FIRE, which need not the wood of the acacia-bush for its maintenance, that He appeared to Moses in the wilderness, to commission him for his life-work. It was as FIRE that HIS presence shone on Mount Sinai, in the giving of the law. The Divine acceptance of the sacrifices throughout the ancient ritual was betokened by the Fire that fell from heaven, and fed upon the flesh of slain beasts. Malachi said that Christ would come as a refiner's FIRE; and when the fore-runner announced His advent, he compared it to the work of the ruddy flame, which destroys and purifies: "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with FIRE." "He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable FIRE." It was, therefore, also in perfect harmony with the entire range of scriptural symbolism, that the Pentecostal descent of the Holy Ghost was accompanied by cloven tongues, like as of FIRE. Of course, we must not and would not, deny that there is a punitive and terrible side to all this. It is no light matter to persist in sin. "In flaming fire" He will take vengeance on them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. "He is terrible in His doing toward the children of men." Fire--which is our most useful ally; which labours for us day and night in our furnaces and fireplaces, is harmless and helpful, so long as we obey its laws and observe its conditions: but when once we disobey those laws, and contravene those conditions, that which blessed begins to curse, and leaps forth upon us, carrying devastation to all our works, so that the smiling fields become a blackened waste, and our palaces a heap of ruins. So it is with the nature of God. He is gentle, loving, and forbearing: but if a sinner persists in sin, shutting his eyes to the light, and closing his heart to the love of God, then he must needs discover that "with the froward He will show Himself froward." "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little."

But let us turn now to some of those gracious thoughts, which are enshrined in this passage. Fire searches. Surely this is one of our greatest needs. There is so much of selfishness and sin in the very best of us. Sometimes we get a glimpse of what we are, and turn our thoughts swiftly away from the horrid spectacle. And what we ourselves dare not contemplate, we carefully hide from the gaze of our tenderest friends. Ah, what pride, what vanity, what self-conceit, are ours! fretful, if not sufficiently admired; jealous, if outshone; mean enough to take advantage of another, if only we can do it without being found out; capable of the same vile sins which flame out as beacon-lights in those who are not restrained by the same outward bonds as we are.

No malicious critic with biting words has ever touched the inveterate evil of our hearts, or said a tithe of the truth of us. We have never ourselves realized how bad we are. We need not be surprised at any further discoveries that may rise up to confront us with shame and agony. But it is well to be searched. The ancient motto bade men know themselves. The discovery of what we are will drive us most quickly to God for His cleansing and grace. We need not wish to dwell upon our sins, as though health could come by considering disease; but we may gladly accept the searching of the fire of God. Let us know the evil things that are within us. Let us be taught how much wood, hay, and stubble, have been built on that foundation, which has undoubtedly been laid in our hearts. Let us submit to the discoveries of disease, which the stethoscope, the searching finger, the probing knife, will disclose. O God, who art as fire, search me and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts!

Fire cleanses. Yonder metal is mingled with many inferior ingredients: the earth, in which it has lain for centuries, clings to it; dross depreciates its value. But plunge it into the glowing furnace; raise the heat until the gleaming light is almost intolerable to the gaze; keep it in that baptism of flame: ere long the metal will be cleansed of its impurities; freed from alloy; and fitted for any mould into which you may desire to pour it. Is it not thus that God will deal with us? He is a consuming fire.

In the olden vision, when Isaiah lamented his uncleanness, there flew unto him one of the seraphim, who had taken a live coal from off the altar, which he laid upon his lips, saying, "Lo! this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." And will not God do as much for us again? We have been cleansed from the stains of our many transgressions: but do we not need this deep, this thorough, this fiery purification?

There are three agents in purification--the Word of God; the Blood of the Son of God; and the Fire of God, which is the Holy Ghost. We know something of the two former: do we know the meaning of the latter? We have been purified by the Water and the Blood: have we passed also through the Fire? "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." We cannot define, in so many words, the manner of this sacred operation--it is a matter for holy consciousness: but the heart knows when it has experienced it. It is not that temptation ceases to assail; or that there is no possibility of again yielding to sin; or that the evil tendencies of the old nature are eradicated: but that there is a burning up and consumption of evil things which had been too long permitted to hold sway, and to mar the glory of the work of God in the heart. There is deliverance, where there was bondage; there is purity, where there was corruption; there is love, where there was malice, envy, ill-will.

This blessed operation of the Holy Ghost may be experienced by those who will take no denial, and who by faith claim all that He waits to do for them. Let us then appropriate that expressive prayer of Wesley's hymn:

"Refining Fire, go through my heart!"

Fire transforms. That poker lying in your fender is hard, and cold, and black; but if you place it for a few moments in the heart of the fire, it becomes soft, intensely hot, and glowing with the whiteness of incandescence. Take it out again, and all its old qualities will re-assert themselves; but whilst in the fire, they cannot be manifested: the iron is transformed into the likeness of the flame in which it is bathed.

Thus is it with ourselves. By nature we too are hard and cold and black; and the tendency of our nature will always be in these directions; waiting to re-assert itself, when left to its own devices. But if only we can for ever dwell with the devouring fire, and dwell with the everlasting burnings of the Love and Light and Life of God--a wonderful change will pass over us; and we shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory. No longer hard, we shall be moulded into any shape He selects. No longer cold, we shall glow with love to God and man. No longer black, we shall be arrayed in the whiteness of a purity, which is that of intensest heat.

Too long have we shrunk from the burning fiery furnace, which is not sorrow, or trial, or pain, but God. Let us get into God. Let us open our nature, that God, the Holy Ghost, may fill us: then shall we become like Himself; our grosser natures shall seem to ascend to heaven in horses and chariots of flame. In God's Fire we shall become Fire.