

KNOWLEDGE, LOVE, OBEDIENCE

We are this morning, as the lovers of Christ, to remember Christ. There are various ways of remembering him. We may think of him in the dim and distant way that the world thinks of him—as a figure in the world's history. Or we may think of him as the symbol of doctrine which we are prepared to formulate and demonstrate with the cold precision of a lawyer, or an anatomist. Or we may think of him as pious sectarians think, as the mere ideal of sensuous sentimentalism. The true way of remembering him includes all these in a certain way, but goes much beyond them. It stands upon three solid foundations—knowledge, understanding and love. Paul's prayer for the Ephesian brethren exhibits the features of the case: that

"God might give unto them the spirit of wisdom in the knowledge and revelation of Him, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they might know what was the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and what the exceeding greatness of His power to reward who believe what He wrought in Christ when He raised him from the dead, and set him at His own right hand" (Eph. 1:17-20).

Again he expressed the desire concerning them that they might—

"henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine . . . but speaking the truth in love might grow up unto him in all things who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure in every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

We all recognise the need for knowledge in order to a right discernment of Christ; but if we come short of the love of Christ which ought to spring from the knowledge of Christ, the result is an abortive one. Paul is very emphatic on this head. His strong desire concerning the brethren was that *"they might know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,"* not only the love which Christ has for those who please him, but the love which they ought to have for him, as expressed in the other words *"that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all fullness of God."*

Concerning himself he declared to the Galatians: *"The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me,"* and to the Philippians, *"for me to live is Christ"* and to the Corinthians, *"the love of Christ constraineth us: because we thus judge that if one died for all, then all died: and that he died for all that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him who died for them and rose again."*

Christ himself made the demand for our love a prominent point in his teaching.

"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy burden: take my yoke upon you and learn of me."

"If any man love father or mother more than me, he is not worthy of me."

"My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me."

"He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him . . . If a man love me, he will keep my words . . . He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings."

The figure of a bride to represent the relation to Christ of those who are to be accepted by him, is a powerful indication in the same direction. What is the leading characteristic of a bride as such, but delightful love towards him to whom she is about to be united? We read of this consummation:

"The marriage of the Lamb is come: and the bride hath made herself ready."

Now, brethren, we have come from religious communities in which this idea is carried to a great and extravagant extreme, to the exclusion of that understanding which is the preliminary to acceptable love. The love of Christ in these communities, has degenerated to an effeminate sentiment, without reasonable body shape, or meaning. But it is just possible that by natural rebound we may go to the other extreme, and be content with knowing about Christ and not loving him. This would be as great a failure as the other. The right form of these things generally lies in the middle. The clear

knowledge of what God has testified concerning Christ should be wedded to the cordial and enthusiastic love which is its natural and reasonable accompaniment. How arid and unlovely is knowledge in any direction without love. Even a man of science, without enthusiasm for his subject, is a failure. Love always makes a man interesting, if it is only in specimen hunting, in eggs or butterflies, or beetles. Even a beast showing interest in its offspring is a pleasant sight. How inexpressibly beautiful is love shown towards high objects: the higher the object, the higher the beauty. In this connection, how noble is the love of Christ in a man. Its pure and healthy original is to be seen in Paul, as when he writes to the Philippians:

"I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection."

Let us rise to this, brethren. We shall be of no use to Christ if we do not love him. He finds pleasure in his people's love as a man finds pleasure in a woman's love. He says we are unworthy of him if we give a stronger love to any human object. He gives us a method by which we may judge ourselves in the matter as to whether we love him. He says—

*"If a man love me, **he will keep my words**" (John 14:23).*

Here is a self-test which we should daily apply. We cannot apply it without making ourselves familiar with his "words," for how can a man keep his "words" who is either ignorant or forgetful of them. Reflection will show us that this test is an absolutely reasonable one. Love always conforms to the will and wishes of its object. See if it is not so. If the love of Christ is a distinct enthusiasm of the mind, the doing of his commandments is inevitable by the laws that govern the mental operations of every human being.

But such an operative love of Christ presupposes faith, and acquaintance. If the worm of doubt be gnawing at the foundation, the growth of love is a moral impossibility, or if there is no doubt, but only distance, through "*the lust of other things entering in*" there will be the same failure in the vigour of love. These are the two points we have to watch:

"Beware lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief."

How are we to beware of unbelief? By being on our guard against that which leads to it. Unbelief is the result of ignorance or partial knowledge in any matter. The first condition of faith is knowledge. Let us give attention to the facts—study the facts: keep company with the facts. Let us take Paul's advice to Timothy:

"give thyself wholly to them."

They are worthy of it. There is no class of facts to be compared with the facts concerning Christ. All other facts have but a superficial bearing. They are limited and transient. The facts concerning Christ go down to the foundations of being, affect the springs of all motive, touch the true philosophy of life, govern the everlasting prospect for individual life. How unwise to give them the second place.

"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly."

This is the apostolic exhortation. It is the voice of reason. It means that we must adopt the habits and methods that will lead to this result. How can a man expect the Word of Christ to dwell richly in him, who does not put it in, but fills up his mind instead with the human thoughts reflected in human literature of the moment, and allows his heart to be wholly preoccupied with the affairs of fleeting life, which may collapse like a bubble any moment? "*Give thyself to reading*" are Paul's words again. This is an absolute necessity. Only by reading can we make God's acquaintance in His revealed Word, and come under the power of His thoughts and commandments. The daily reading of the Bible ought to be the inexorable practice of every man and woman who aims to "*overcome*" in the battle all have to wage, who mean to "*lay hold on eternal life*."

Personal love towards Christ can only be generated by contact with the personal manifestation of him which we have in the apostolic writings. It is thus that all love comes by knowledge and acquaintance of the things or persons to be loved. The means of acquaintance in this case are wonderfully ample. How full, in the biographic sense, is the exhibition of Christ in the gospels. No one spoken of in the Scriptures receives the prominence that Christ receives. We have very little concerning even Moses in the personal sense. He appears merely as the medium and instrument of the divine commands. The prophets, as persons, are scarcely visible in their communications. Of the

apostles, we get but a very casual glimpse in their relations with Christ; but Christ stands before us in prolonged and full drawn brightness, with many details of word, and work and gesture. We are permitted to make his full acquaintance, though nothing is said of the colour of his hair, the contour or complexion of his face, the measure of his stature, or other such immaterial particulars. We hear his voice, and see his demeanour and discern his spirit. The contemplation leads us to exclaim, with Thomas, *“my Lord and my God.”*

We have been in his company this morning in the reading of the 24th chapter of Luke. This is perhaps the most beautiful of all the presentments of him we have. The picture is full of tranquillity and sunshine. It is suggestive of the morning calm after the storm of a terrible night. How pleasant to be with him as he joins the two disciples on the road to Emmaus as they *“walk and are sad”*—holding their eyes that they should not know him. How deeply interesting to hear him ask, *“What is the matter?”*—and to note him listen attentively while they rehearse the awful calamities of the last few days, and to listen to his cheering explanation of the whys and the wherefores by appeal to what was written in Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms concerning himself. How delightful to turn into the same house with them, and to hear him give thanks for the refreshment about to be partaken of. How thrillingly perplexing to note his sudden disappearance and the surprised embarrassment of the two as they exchange excited comments on the extraordinary words of their vanished companion, and gather up their things for an instantaneous return to Jerusalem. How pleasing when we get there to hear their account to the eleven, that *“the Lord hath risen indeed and hath appeared to Simon.”* How agreeable to hear the absorbing discussion which sets in among them upon all these facts. How unspeakable the impressiveness of his sudden reappearance in their midst, their stupefied incredulity, his appeals to their senses, and his reassuring rally of their memory.

“These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you that all things must be fulfilled which are written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms concerning me.”

A little way back, we are with him in very different circumstances.

“In an agony,” in Gethsemane, *“he prays more earnestly, his sweat being as great drops of blood, falling to the ground.”*

The mental conflict is appalling, in prospect of what is before him by command of the Father. We see him kneel; we see him cast himself on his face; we hear him earnestly implore,

“Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done.”

We see an angel strengthen and soothe and encourage him to the submission required. We see him at last a prisoner in the hands of an unfeeling—a cruel mob; we see him in a court, the butt of judicial scorn and menial insult. We see him treated as the basest criminal, under the scourge. We see him at last nailed to a cross under the open vault of heaven, a spectacle to a soul-less, jeering rabble surging round. We hear his dying wail; we behold him lifeless hanging there, and witness the frown of heaven in the veiling of the sun and the convulsion of the earth.

“He gave himself for our sins that he might redeem us from this present evil world.”

Further back still, we see a different picture. We see the Lord patiently ministering and teaching among crowds of people who could give him no society; *“going about and doing good”*—to the sinner, saying *“Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more;”* to the forbidding and overzealous disciples, *“Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of heaven;”* to the appealing blind man, whom the crowd try to silence, *“Bid him come hither,”* to the emulative disciples, *“This I command you that ye love one another. He that exalteth himself shall be abased. He that is greatest amongst you, let him be as he that serveth;”* to Jerusalem with tears, *“If thou hadst known even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes . . . O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, but ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto desolate, and ye shall not see me henceforth until that time come that ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”*

If the contemplation of these aspects of the Lord excite our love, and command our reverence, what shall we say of the one remaining aspect that lies ahead? It is no illusory act of the mind that looks forward to his reappearance in the earth. The expectation rests on the express promise of Christ himself, on the clear foreshadowing of the prophets, who *“spake as they were moved by the Holy*

Spirit,” and on the repeated declaration of the apostles, who were led into all truth by the same Spirit as Jesus promised. The character of his second coming rests on the same clearly-spoken and authenticated word. It combines every element that is calculated to excite admiration and engage love. Power and excellence, and goodness, on an errand of rescue, always appeal to sympathy, even on the low plane of humanity, but what shall we say to such power, and such excellence, and such goodness, as appertain to the resurrected Lord Jesus arriving on such a mission as the Word of God outlines for him:

“*His reward with him and his work before him?*”

We shall then see the full meaning of his words:

“*All power is given to me in heaven and earth.*”

The words are true now, but their truth is not self-evident. We apprehend their truth by process of reason: “*we walk by faith and not by sight.*” But when he comes “*in power and great glory and all the holy angels with him,*” it will no longer be a matter of faith but of manifest fact that will move the world.

“*Look, ye saints, the sight is glorious, see the man of sorrows now, to the earth returned victorious, every knee to him shall bow.*”

Every knee will not bow at first. It is revealed that “*the kings of the earth and their armies*” will fight against him. It is also revealed that “*the Lamb shall overcome them,*” and that “*all nations shall come and worship when the judgments of God are made manifest.*” How blessed to be among those who will bow the knee with an enlightened alacrity at once. How “*blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching,*” and waiting, and longing, and preparing. The Lord says he will himself “*make them sit down to meat and come forth and serve them.*” He tells us he will invite them to enter into his joy, to sit down at his table, to share his throne, and to partake of the glory, and dominion, and honour, and gladness that will belong to him as the conquering King of all the earth. Yea, he will change them into his own immortal nature and bring them into his Father’s House as the bride whom he loves and whom he will take pleasure in nourishing and cherishing and honouring for evermore.

These are not pretty fables. They are not poetical fancies. They are the words of authentic truth, as sober and demonstrable as any problem in mathematics. How reasonable, then, to open our hearts wide and warm to the reception and reciprocation of his love. How irrational and narrow-minded and benighted to despise the love of Christ as effeminate or a visionary. It is neither visionary nor effeminate. It is as actual and solidly founded as any human love under the sun, and it is nobler and more beautiful love than any to be found in merely natural channels among the sons of men. It is one of the thousand sadnesses of the age that a man cultivating the enthusiastic love of Christ should be regarded as an insipient maniac. It is all perfectly intelligible to those who are abreast of all the facts. The world does not love Christ because he stands as the symbol and incarnation of ideas with which it has no sympathy. He is the manifested name and authority of God, and for God the world has no taste. The world is a mass of population which cares only for what it can eat and drink and sensuously enjoy. As John says,

“*All that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.*”

As Jesus says,

“*All these things the nations of the world seek after.*”

“*They have not known the Father nor me.*”

They are, in relation to real wisdom, where the barbarians of uncivilised countries are in relation to the problems and achievements of science.

Are we to be intimidated by the voice and example of unreason because it has a host of followers and slaves? Are we to shun the light because “*darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people?*” Rather be it ours to walk in the light that we may be the children of the light who shall receive the approbation of the Lord of Light when he comes to establish the everlasting day that will chase from the earth for ever the dreadful night of sin and sorrow that broods everywhere on its surface.

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