

The Logos as Shepherd

Various are the aspects under which we are called upon to consider the Lord, as we meet thus from morning to morning to show forth his death until he come. Those aspects are successively brought before us in the Scripture readings of the day. This morning, it is a high one, almost too high for mortal comprehension.

“The word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”

To understand the import of this statement, we must have in view what goes before. John had introduced the subject of the “word” or LOGOS in the very first verse of his first chapter.

“In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God. All things were made by him. Without him was not anything made that was made,” &c.

There is a peculiarity in this mode of introducing the subject of God that challenges attention. It is different from anything we meet with in any other part of the Scriptures. Why does John use this term Logos? It is probably due to the prevalence of a controversy that had been going on among people of a philosophical turn of mind for several centuries, and which was particularly rife in the days of John. Socrates and Plato, and particularly Plato, had formulated a theory of creation, in which a power figured prominently under the name of Logos. There was no more truth in the views they promulgated than in any other part of their wisdom, which was foolishness with God; but in the absence of revelation, these views commended themselves to the natural mind and had become greatly current among the educated people of the first century—many of whom embraced the truth under apostolic attestation. There would be a great deal of talk about the Logos, and John in effect, says in the opening of this chapter, there is no other Logos but God.

“In the beginning was the (true) Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God.”

But why Logos? Logos means word, speech, or reason. What is there that sustains the relation to God that a spoken word or reason does to a man? We have not to go far in our readings of the Scriptures to discover. The most common form of speech in the prophets is—

“Thus saith the Lord.”

When we enquire how God spoke to the prophets—how the word of the Lord came to them—we get the answer:

“By His Spirit.”

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,”

“The Spirit of the Lord came upon Oded,” &c.

“By thy Spirit in the prophets.”

Hence the word (or Logos) and the Spirit are convertible terms; but this is a different Logos from the classical Logos. The “Logos” of Platonic philosophy had as little to do with the actual creatorship of the universe as the Platonic immortal soul had to do with the immortality brought to light by Christ in the Gospel. The real Logos was that which John proclaimed:

“The Logos was God.”

The true “word” or voice of the Almighty was the Spirit—which in its immensity is God Himself, for God is Spirit, and the Spirit is God. To say the Logos or Spirit was **with** God was not to interfere with this identity, but merely to intimate that other aspect of the matter in which the Father in Heaven is apparently one, and the Spirit everywhere present apparently another, though both are one, as the sun and the light are one.

To say then that “*the Word was made flesh*” in the appearance of Jesus Christ among men, was to give Jesus a very high rank. It was to say what Paul afterwards said, that “*God was manifest in the flesh*,” and what Jesus himself said,

“*My Father dwelleth in me.*”

Those who think “*the Word made flesh*” merely means that the truth in the abstract became flesh, that the word preached was no longer announced through a prophet but manifested in a man wholly consecrated to it, fail to realise the key-note struck by John in his opening verses. It is not a question of the spoken word that John deals with, but of the creating word and the eternal word.

“*All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*”

It is the idea expressed in the psalm:

“*He **spake** and it was done, he **commanded** and it stood fast.*”

“*By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.*”

This was the word that “*was made flesh*,” of whom John goes on to say:

“*And we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And of his fulness have we (apostles) all received in grace (or favour) for grace (or use towards others as grace or favour).*”

How high is the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, when viewed in this light. He is “*made higher than the heavens*,” higher than the angels, “*as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.*” Wherefore, saith Paul, quoting from the Psalms,

“*Let all the angels of God worship him.*”

And is it not said to the bride,

“*He is thy Lord; worship thou him?*”

When Thomas said to Jesus at his second interview with the disciples, “*My Lord and my God*,” he employed language of extremest reverence, but not too fervid. When we see him, we shall see the Father veiled.

“*The head of every man is Christ*,” though “*the head of Christ is God.*”

We have to take heed in an age like ours, when so many inadequate views (and worse) of Christ prevail, that we be not found harbouring derogatory ideas that will make us unacceptable worshippers in the day of his glory. The discovery that he is not the co-equal Deity of Trinitarian theology has driven some into extremes in the opposite direction.

Jesus is the Eternal Father come nigh to man in a mediator for reconciliation—

“*God, in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself*”

(2 Cor. 5:19).

Jesus gives the same idea in intense expression, when he says:

“*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.*”

“*Why sayest thou, Philip, Lord show us the Father? From henceforth ye have seen him and known him,*” and

“*I pray not the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you, because ye believe that I came out from God.*”

If this appear to eclipse his character as the obedient Son of God, and our elder brother, it is only because the matter is so perfectly glorious that it blends in itself the two distinct elements specified by Christ when he said,

“*I am in the Father, and the Father in me.*”

The Father tabernacling in an obedient Son gives us a personage of transcending interest, far beyond anything ever conceived among human dignities—the majesty and authority of the Creator wreathing and ennobling the humility and submissiveness of a Son, who “*learned obedience by the things that he suffered.*” To such an one, our love easily turns to worship,

and service into rapturous praise. It is a natural effort that we strive “*to know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge.*” We even grow in a sense impatient to have done with this burdened and earth-cleaving state, in which we can only see dimly and afar off, and follow with faltering steps at a distance. We long to throw off this dull nature, in which we cannot do the things that we would, and to be clothed upon with that garment of praise which awaits the investiture of all the saints at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Our souls cleave to the dust, and our harps are often on the willow. The fault is with this disordered nature, which we shall throw off in due time, as certainly as the imprisoned butterfly sheds its chrysalis, and soars in the pouring sunlight amid the fragrance of flowers and the blue of heaven.

Meanwhile, as we trudge through this “*great and terrible wilderness*” (not too high a figure for those who have learnt to estimate this present existence at its true character), it is comforting to realise the aspect of Christ suggested by his comparison to a shepherd.

“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd. He shall carry the lambs in his arm, and gently lead those that are with young.”

We cannot see much of this shepherding with our actual eyes just now. There is no doubt that primarily, these beautiful words describe what Christ will be to the population of the world in the day of his kingdom, as contrasted with the wild beasts of present governments. But that they have an application now is equally without doubt. It was to this present time that the words of Christ applied when he said he was the good shepherd that cared for his sheep and laid down his life for them.

“My sheep hear my voice,” he said, *“and they follow me. A stranger will they not follow: for they know not the voice of a stranger.”*

This fixes the time to which his words apply. It is a time when there is a choice between following the voice of the good shepherd or the voice of a stranger. The voice of the stranger will be hushed when the Lord is here to reign. Consequently, it is now that he says he is the good shepherd caring for the sheep, and calling them all by name, and going before and leading them. We do not see this operation, but we know he has the power to perform it.

“In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

God has given him to be head over all things for his body’s sake which is the Ecclesia. So Paul testifies, and so it is for us to believe upon evidence that cannot be set aside. By the eye of authentic history, we have seen him depart visibly to the Father’s right hand, since which, we have seen him send the Holy Spirit in abundant outpouring on the disciples; and appear to Saul of Tarsus, owing to the persecution of his people as persecution directed against him; and send to John in Patmos, at the end of the apostolic age a revelation of things to come, in which he appears as the watchful and observant superintendent of the ecclesias, and the controller of public events among the Gentiles. With all this in view, it is easy to believe in his shepherding care of the few scattered sheep, scattered on the dark mountains of the present evil world, and furtively browsing as the operations of the wolves permit. True it is, that we live at the end of a long period of Scriptural anarchy during which apostolic principles have been quenched, to all human appearances; and that the truth’s operations revived by the study of the testimony, are both very weak and necessarily unlike the apostolic original in its external form. But we cannot but suppose the Lord equally alive to His work in the nineteenth century as in the first. In its essence, it is the same, though differing in its adjuncts and its accidents. That essence is, faith in the promises constituting the Gospel, love for the things presented for faith, and obedience of the commandments prescribed for obedience. If the work is but a weak reflex of the vigorous original, it is a circumstance probably calling for and receiving the Lord’s commiseration. It is due to the differing circumstances of the two situations.

In the first century, “*the Lord worked with*” the disciples, “*confirming their word with signs following.*” In the nineteenth, there is a total absence of such cooperation. In the

first century, the central fact of the Gospel was presented with all the stirring power and freshness of personal knowledge. The preachers were “witnesses” of the things they urged upon the world’s attention, whereas we have but documents and historic facts to appeal to—of great power, granted, when discerned in their true character: but of no power at all with the bulk of the people around us, whose minds are wholly preoccupied with the concerns of mortal life, and whose little latent disposition to enquire for truth is quenched and killed by the influence of false science and sceptical teachers. The operations of the apostles, backed up by divine power, and relating to facts of contemporary notoriety, secured the attention of the most considerable of mankind, embracing even the members of Caesar’s household (Phil. 4:22), and consequently possessed a prestige and influentiarity which imparted public weight and importance to the work of the Gospel. In our day, there is nothing to command public attention to the truth but the intrinsic reasonableness of the movement, and this perhaps is somewhat marred and disfigured by the personal peculiarities of its agents and advocates.

In all these circumstances, it is easy to understand the great difference between the form and success of the truth’s testimony in the two different times. But where the truth works an effectual individual work, its results are the same in all times and places—whether first century in Asia Minor, or nineteenth century in the British Empire and the States. The love of God is implanted; intense desire for His promised interference in human affairs is created; and a strong relish is formed for all those principles of righteousness, kindness, and truth, that belong to the law of the Lord alone. “*Looking for Christ’s appearing*,” and “*loving*” the prospect of it, become the deepest desire and affection of the mind. A new man is formed by the very same power that formed new men in the first century—men of faith, men of love, men of worship, men of hope; and the same supreme anticipation is generated concerning the glorious future of deliverance exhibited in the Gospel—deliverance from the weakness and death shadow of a mortal nature; and deliverance of the earth from the countless evils that come from man’s impotent and incompetent efforts to govern himself.

Consequently, it is no presumption, but the conclusion of sound reason to believe that equally now, as in the first century, the Lord has his eye upon the men and women who are his sheep, hearing his voice and following him. How great is the consolation arising from this conclusion. It is written,

“It is not in man that liveth to direct his steps.”

How true this is we do not discover till we have lived a considerable time. In the days of youth, it seems the easiest thing in the world. But at last it comes home to us almost with bewildering force that life is made up of such a variety of uncontrollable currents that man, on the sea of life (with his best management) is pretty much in the position of a toy boat in the waters of the ocean. The conclusion is forced home upon us, that—

“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.”

In such a situation, how consoling it is to know that there is a captain at the helm of our affairs—that there is a shepherd looking after his bleating, hungry, anxious sheep, driving them, perhaps, along rough paths sometimes, that lead homewards, and anon leading them by still waters and fat pastures, and at all times guiding them and protecting them from pitfalls and dangers when the day is dark and the mountain mists are threatening. We cannot see his guiding hand, but we have reason for faith in it. And we shall see its effects—in those “ways of Providence” that all the fathers have experienced. Nothing will qualify us so much for the reading of them as the study of the history contained in the Scriptures, which is one long illustration of works of God done in an apparently natural way. We shall never be able to say in the presumptuous shout of some that this or that is positively the guiding hand of God, but we shall always be able to trust ourselves wholly, in all circumstances, good or evil, to the invisible guidance that God has promised to those who fear Him, and which is the peculiar knowledge of those whom Christ “*knows*” as his sheep; concerning whom he says,

“They shall never perish,” and “no man is able to pluck them out of my hand.”

“This is the Father’s will,” he said again, “that I should lose none of them, but should raise them up on the last day.”

If we are anxious at all on the question of whether we are his sheep, we have but to ponder the words in which he denotes their characteristic:

*“My sheep **hear my voice.**”*

That this means obeying his commandments is absolutely certain from other definitions:

“They that hear the word of God and do it”;

“He that doeth the will of my Father”;

“He that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them”;

“He that keepeth my commandments,” &c., &c.

Anxiety should therefore take the practical form of making ourselves acquainted with his commandments and doing them. If a man will do this, Christ will not disown his own work:

“Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”

“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.”

Are we afflicted with a sense of our shortcoming on this head? There is a wise way and an unwise way of dealing with these shortcomings. The unwise way is to sit down under their weight, and lose all heart, and make no further effort. The wise way is to be up and doing under the stimulus of Christ’s other words:

“Be zealous and repent.”

It pleases him that we “try again” and “try again.” He is not an unconcerned spectator of the struggles of his brethren. Though he dare not supplant our own volition, still he can supplement it. We have the promise that he will do so. Paul not only remarks,

“We have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was tempted in all points like as we are,” but he says that *“having suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”*

Is he able to succour, and will he not do it? Angels strengthened him in the hour of trial: will he fail? *“Angels and principalities and powers are subject to him:”* will he use them in controlling his enemies, and not in helping his friends? There is only one answer to all these questions, and it is best expressed in the exhortation of Paul:

*“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain **mercy**, and find grace to help in time of need.”*

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