

"Go Forward!"

The object of our assembly this morning may be summed up in the words, "To remember Christ", and in this our Faith is motivated by a consideration of the past, present and future. In this connection, our readings for the day can form a suitable basis for consideration and reflection, as two poles of God's great plan of salvation are brought before us—Moses and Christ. Jesus commends the writings of Moses to us when he said to the Jews: "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me". The Law therefore continues to be a schoolmaster, because it leads us to the things in Christ.

The circumstances attending the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt are very well known. However, a close study of the details reveals many thoughts of an exhortative nature, sometimes not seen in the general outline of the Exodus. On whose account then were these things written? It certainly did not benefit those whose eyes were blinded; neither can those who reduce them to legend and tradition draw any consolation from them. For OUR sakes are they written. They are the priceless heritage of the Ecclesia of Christ. It remains for us to draw the consolation, strength and comfort from them by a consideration of the mercy and love of God toward those whom He has called. It would seem from Exod. 13:17-8 that God led the people in a round-about way through the wilderness, for we read:

"And it came to pass when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near, but God led the people about through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea."

First of all it is necessary to recall that the divine purpose behind their departure from Egypt and their journey through the wilderness was to humble them and to prove them, and to know what was in their hearts whether they would keep the commandments or not. When this is understood, a remarkable parallel is seen between our position and theirs.

"AND THEY WERE SORE AFRAID"

Here was a great company of people, men, women and children and their substance which they brought from Egypt, in an apparent trap, with the Red Sea to their front, a mountain barrier to the North and South, and the road to Egypt in the rear, and they were there by direct commandment of God. Egypt was at this time in the plenitude of power, and the waters of the Red Sea were real—very real. But how weak is human nature, and how prone they were to forget! It mattered not to them that God's great power and saving arm was manifested in Egypt in a manner that shook not only Egypt, but the surrounding nations. It mattered not to them that the angel of His presence was between them and the Egyptians. It mattered not that God has surrounded the host with a wall of fire. Their faith failed, and they were terrified.

The statement by the Apostle Paul that "Without faith it is impossible to please God" is equally applicable to every generation. We continually thank God for having called us out of darkness unto the light of His Word, and this ecclesia has for many years attempted to penetrate the future through the light of Prophecy with the aid of Eureka. There is every evidence that the future will be a period of great trial to us both individually and ecclesially. We do not wish to minimize that. Daniel terms it a time of trouble such as never was, but how easy it is for us to extract FEAR from that which is designed to produce CONFIDENCE, to see DESPAIR in that which is intended to produce HOPE, and to see only TROUBLE in that which is designed to bring us COMFORT and consolation! Let us call to mind the words of our Master who, on speaking of the terrible calamities which would herald his presence on earth, said:

"When ye see these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

If the Hebrews had made a correct appraisal of their situation through the eye of Faith, they could well have sung the Song of Moses in contemplation and anticipation of coming deliverance. Instead, they longed for Egyptian bondage, and cried out unto the Lord. Moses attempted to reassure the people and said: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord."

"GO FORWARD"

Moses was aware of the precarious position in which the people were placed, and his statement can be taken as an indication that he thought God would in some manner deliver them, but on considering the answer of God to him, we wonder whether Moses' statement was a full declaration of Faith:

"Wherefore comest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward."

Can it be that Moses appealed unto God for direction, when his course lay clear? For us to pray for guidance and strength to walk in the light of Christ's commandments is good and acceptable with God, but to hesitate and stop and entrench ourselves when our course lies open according to the revelation of His will, will not help the situation.

The history of the Ecclesia of Christ has been to a great extent a history of brethren and sisters who KNEW the path and pursued it with all their heart and understanding. "Stand still and see the salvation of God", but alas, the children of Israel were a long way from their inheritance.

"HARNESSED"

In Exod. 12:18, it is recorded: "And the children of Israel went up HARNESSED out of Egypt". That is, girded, equipped for movement and action. The Apostle Paul advances the same thought and applies it to those in Christ. Taking the figure of the Roman soldier he counseled the Ephesian brethren to have their feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace, their loins girded about with Truth, armed with the breastplate of Righteousness, shield of Faith, helmet of Salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Moses and the children of Israel were equipped for action. So are we! "Speak unto the children of Israel that they GO FORWARD."

No doubt it is the innermost desire of many of us to find solitude and quietness, and build—as it were—a wall between us and the world. It is true God has provided times of refreshing, times such as this when we are away from the world to enjoy each other's fellowship. We may feel to some extent like the disciples who witnessed the vision of splendor and were in the company of Moses, Elijah and Christ. "Master, it is good for us to be here" said Peter. "Let us make a tabernacle. Let us ABIDE here". But they were soon faced with the reality of things. Moses and Elijah had conversed with Jesus and spoke of the deace he must accomplish at Jerusalem. They were in an atmosphere of divine glory, a foretaste of things to come, the influence of which remained with them as long as they lived, but they were also taught the lesson that God has a work in the valley below, and that the struggling mass of humanity must have the Gospel preached unto them.

A TIME TO WORK

Never in the world's history have men been confronted with a task as great. There is an ever-present danger of the Ecclesia ungirding itself as though the Kingdom were already attained; as though the Kingdom were not something to be diligently sought after, as though God is not still calling out from the nations a people for His Name. Is it possible that we as an Ecclesia could become self-centered and spend much time over things of little consequence, while the weightier matters of the Truth are neglected? Is it possible that we are looking too closely upon ourselves, and blind to the

great objectives before us? Is it possible that we are giving up the struggle? If so, then the exhortation is to us: "Speak to the children of Israel that they GO FORWARD".

It is a divinely recorded fact that less than 300 years after Christ, by far the greater part of those who claimed allegiance to his name were so rich in material things and positions of state, that they thought that the kingdom had already come, and proclaimed, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ;" These things said they, while they cast out those who were keeping the Faith alive on the earth.

"THY WAY, NOT MINE, O LORD"

To measure ourselves according to the light of the Word and to seek to overcome the sin that doth so easily beset us is evidence of a forward movement, and there is no greater or more effective way to do this than to lose ourselves in the work of the Truth. Stagnant water by its calm and quiet appearance sometimes makes a picture of great beauty, especially if surrounded by trees, but the water is unfit for human consumption, whereas the running brook, by its very movement purifies itself and refreshes the traveller. One is inclined to think of the words of John who wrote:

"And every man that hath this hope in him PURIFIETH HIMSELF, even as he is pure."

The same thought is advanced in Luke 12:35 & 36,—

"Let your loins be girded about, and your light burning: and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord."

The children of Israel followed a pillar of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. In this they had followed divine instructions, yet if left to their own judgment, it is doubtful if any of them would have taken the course indicated by the pillar of a cloud, they would have taken what seemed to them to be an easier and more direct way, but God saw that this course would be fraught with dangers and pitfalls. Where did the way of the pillar of cloud lead them? It led them to safety and deliverance. Where will it lead us? Are we following the pillar and cloud. We sometimes sing.—

Thy way, not mine, O Lord, However dark it be!
Lead me by Thine own hand, Choose out the path for me.

We read in the Psalms that God's Word is a lamp to our feet. If we endeavour to follow His Word, in both precept and example, it will lead to deliverance—a deliverance in which the opening of the Red Sea fades into insignificance by comparison,

"For blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates of the city."

We may reason within ourselves that if we could but see the visible demonstration of the divine power on earth as evidenced in Egypt, it would be enough for us. But which is greater, prophecy miraculously given, or the same prophecy unfolding itself in the affairs of nations? In Rev. 15 we read of what are called the "seven last plagues". Now whereas the plagues of Egypt are confined to that country, these last plagues are world-wide in their scope. As the signs and wonders shown in Egypt resulted in victory and deliverance for Israel, so these last plagues will bring victory and deliverance to the saints. THEY sang the "Song of Moses;" the SAINTS will sing the "Long of Moses and the Lamb", a song of joy and triumph.

HOLD FAST THE VISION

There is always the possibility of losing sight of the vision. It is recorded that the things that are SEEN are temporal, and the things NOT seen are eternal. Unless we go forward in full assurance

of faith, the barriers in our path will be magnified. We have but to recall that God is proving us, and chastening us daily. Jesus said his yoke was easy and his burden light. It all lies in our ATTITUDE, which in turn is determined by our LOVE and ATTACHMENT. How easy it is for us to view things as the children of Israel did and leave God out of the picture! The Truth is in conflict with the world daily. The sentiments and aims of even the most honorable men are directly opposed to it. Legislation could dissolve us, as power is in the hands of the adversaries of Truth. Regimentation is before the world, and we will be affected. These things are true, and they would stand out like mountains unless we could see beyond them. The promise of God is that He will never leave or forsake us, and that, providing WE are faithful, it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do. When the children of Israel lost sight of the fact that God was with them, that He was guarding them day and night with tender and affectionate care; that He was chastening and proving them as a father would his son, THEN they were faint and weak and wanted to return to Egypt.

The Apostle Paul, outlining notable examples of faith, wrote: "By faith he (Moses) forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured as seeing Him Who is invisible." There is not such a thing as "blind faith". Old Testament worthies quoted as examples were men and women who KNEW what God had promised, and regulated and adjusted their lives in accordance.

"BY FAITH"

In the final reckoning, what greater testimony could anyone have than it could be said of us, BY FAITH we kept His commandments and sought His kingdom, being unmoved by the shame and humiliation. By faith we also kept the Passover (Christ our Passover) during his absence in anticipation of coming deliverance, and in order that the love, mercy and kindness of God may live in our minds during our Master's absence.

We also may lose sight of the fact that God is with us. Is it not written "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst to bless"? A few apparent hardships and difficulties along the route, and the Hebrews became faint and longed to return to Egypt. God was said to have been "grieved with that generation", and the Apostle writes: "Their carcasses fell in the wilderness," and exhorts us not to fall after the same example of unbelief. Many having known and embraced the Truth have turned back. Many and various reasons no doubt are advanced, but the reason given by Jesus covers most cases, "The love of many shall wax cold". Such should consider their position while it is yet today. It is better not to have known the way of righteousness than turn from the Holy Commandments.

The Apostle Paul exhorts us not to forsake the assembly, and Jesus said: "Do this in remembrance of me." Let us therefore adjust our affairs in order that they will not conflict with the meetings. Jesus linked the past with the future when he said, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Let us go forward, knowing that shortly God will destroy that great arch enemy of mankind, death, resulting in victory and deliverance for all His saints, when it will be no longer necessary to draw consolation and comfort from types and shadows, for the Lamb will be on Mount Zion when all righteous tongues will find employ in songs of everlasting joy. —W.T.
