

Sunday Morning No. 287

WE are here by the commandment of Christ to break bread and drink wine in remembrance of him. Some have asked where Christ has commanded this. We answer—when he said, “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” But where, say they, did he command us to do it on the first day of the week and every first day of the week? We answer, when the disciples of the first generation did so under apostolic auspices. Jesus said concerning the apostles, “*He that heareth you heareth me.*” Consequently, we hear Christ when we hear Paul referring to this breaking of bread. He said to the Corinthians, “*I praise you brethren that ye . . . keep the ordinances as I delivered them unto you . . . For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread,*” &c. But, says the objector, he says nothing about the first day of the week. Not there: he does before he finishes—namely, five chapters further on: “*Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.*” What they did on the first day of the week, we are plainly told in Acts 20: “*Upon the first day of the week, the disciples came together to break bread.*”

Therefore, the command is clear, and the duty manifest, even if Paul had not said, “*Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is*” (Heb. 10:25). Even if it had not been quite clear, love would have inclined us to it. Love is quick to gather the will of the beloved. That the Lord wished us to remember him, no one can deny—still less that it is good to remember him, and the oftener the better. The utter demoralisation that sets in with regard to all spiritual things, when men neglect the breaking of bread, would of itself be a reason why we should “*do this until he come.*” Finally, who can think it possible that the Lord will be displeased at our breaking bread every first day of the week? On the other hand, is it quite certain that he will be displeased with those who are slack in the matter.

We are justified in taking the strongest possible ground.

This will we do, our absent Lord,
We will remember thee.

Remembering him, we call to mind many things—even, in a sense, all the things that are brought under our notice in the reading of any part of the Scriptures. Wherever we read, we have things in some divine relation, leading us in some way or other ultimately to Christ. Take the Psalms we have read—the 90th and the 91st. In the 90th, we have things great and things small, things bright and things dark, things that meet in Christ—things essential to the right understanding of human experience—very high mountains, very deep valleys. What higher mountain than this—“*From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God?*” Here is a mountain stretching away and disappearing in the infinite blue of heaven. Who can reach to it? Well might David say, “*It is high, I cannot attain to it.*” It belongs to the things which the limited mind of man can only consent to as self-evident, though incomprehensible: true, though beyond understanding. Many such things there are. Life is one of them: light is another: the infinitude of time and space, another. The beginningless and endlessness and gloriousness of God is the most glorious of them all. It is well to look it in the face and say, “It is so and it must be so.” It is well to open heart and mind and let in the glorious light. It is well to abandon all hesitations and uncertainties. It is well to surrender to the true, though we may lack power to realise it—to recognise once for all the uncontradictable, though it may elude our grasp, or escape our puny efforts at demonstration. Rally common-sense on the subject. However difficult it may be for us to conceive the idea that God has been from everlasting, is it not equally impossible to conceive that any time was when there was nothing? Is it not self-evident that there must always have been something? How ever could there have come anything if there ever had been a time when there was nothing? Since, then, it is inevitable that something must always have been, it is equally inevitable that that something must have been equal to the production of the vast, glorious, and wise fabric of heaven and earth—**must have been**, because here these things are, displaying power and wisdom of

the most staggering description. Are not heaven and earth wisely constructed down to the smallest creature that lives in them? Do they not all subsist in power omnipotent? The Eternal from which they sprang must, therefore, have had wisdom and strength, whatever name men choose to give it. Without wisdom, things could not have been wisely constituted; without strength, they could not exist. There they are—the product of wisdom and strength: therefore, the wisdom and strength must have been eternal. Yet who can conceive of eternal power and wisdom, under any formula whatever? Man's mind is too feeble to take in the great idea. But are we to be intimidated from receiving truth because it is beyond our understanding? Here is the expression, before our eyes, in the material system of things we call the universe, of a power antecedent to it, equal to its production. The fact is **there**. It cannot be denied; it cannot be escaped in any real process of reflection. It is not a phantom: it is not a theory: it is a phenomenon whose reality is in no way affected by our inability to handle it. The recognition of it is a simple necessity that cannot be evaded in the exercise of the intellect. It is not enough to know, but it is a good preparation for the further knowledge to be known, that "*God, who made the earth, did also, at sundry times and divers manners, speak unto the fathers by the prophets, and last of all by His Son.*"

In this, we have God brought very nigh to our cognition, though not to our understanding: thus we are brought right into the presence of Christ, who is the Revelator of the "*Lord of heaven and earth.*" He reveals the Father more directly in a personal sense than the prophets, but not under any different aspect. He reveals Him as a unity filling immensity by the energy of His presence, and yet in the heaven of heavens gathering up in Himself in personal focus the glory and power of the universe. It is a grand, a sublime idea, from which a freezing unbelief cuts off the shivering sons of men.

Side by side with this great mountain in Psa. 90, is a great valley. "*Thou turnest man to destruction.*" "*He cometh forth as a flower and is cut down: in the morning it groweth up; in the evening it is cut down and withereth.*" Here is a mighty descent from the glory of God. Here are gloom and vanity and death, in contrast to the brightness and power and immortality of the Godhead. We know it is a true picture. It is no mere nightmare of a dyspeptic pessimism. It is the truth that man is mortal, and his life a barren abortive thing. Why is it so? On the surface of things, it would appear to be out of harmony with the other truth that God is everlasting and omnipotent and glorious. In reality, the one is the result of the other. The psalm supplies the clue in another expression: "*We are consumed by **thine anger**: by **thy wrath** are we troubled.*" But why anger? Why wrath? God can be angry. Man in his intellectual pride may ignore the fact, but it is revealed; and why should it be difficult to receive? If man, the highest of all the creatures upon earth, can be angry to more destructive purpose than the wildest and strongest of animals, why should it be thought a thing incredible that the fountain of all mentality should have the capability of anger as well as of love? Anger in the human breast is a flashing electrical combustion known only as an experimental fact—not understood as to its inner metaphysical nature. Are not men foolish who suppose the storm in their little teapot is the only combustion that is possible? Though it is revealed that God is gracious, long-suffering, slow to anger, it is also revealed that "*Our God is a consuming fire,*" and the revelation **has** been illustrated in many a paroxysm of human suffering in the times past, from the destruction of the world by a flood of waters to the fiery effects of the six vials of divine wrath on Europe. God's anger is the explanation of human woe, and human insubordination to God is the explanation of God's anger. Human constitution is the explanation of human insubordination; and the divine aim in the creation of man is the explanation of the human constitution—an aim not to be fully discerned till the earth is peopled with a glad, humble, grateful, immortal population, ascribing to God perpetually the glory due unto his name. Thus you have to go backwards and forwards to understand the problem of evil which is insoluble on all merely natural principles.

This is the prayer which the psalm puts into our mouth: "*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.*" Men as a rule do not "apply their hearts to wisdom." They do not care to understand. They rather "*say unto God, depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of thy ways*" (Job 21:14). They are content to leave the whole problem of human woe an unsolved problem, and to snatch what little bit of passing satisfaction they can get on their passage through this vain life

to the grave. This would be all very well if it was a matter that did not affect them. But it affects them very deeply. They are all passing away—withering from day to day—hastening onwards to that final dispensation of despair which is the issue of life under divine anger. If God had no purpose, there would be nothing for it but to make the best of our evil lot: but God having a purpose which He has revealed, it does seem like madness for men to be content to live without any reference to it. The psalm recognises the purpose in another prayer it contains: “*Oh! satisfy us early with thy mercy. Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy word appear unto thy servants and thy glory unto their children.*” This prayer will be answered, because it is the purpose that has been formed. Evil will give place to good. The promise that has been made will be fulfilled, that “*there shall be no more curse, neither sorrow nor crying, pain nor death.*” “*His anger endures but for a moment,*” in a dispensational sense. “In his favour, there is life. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. God’s words to Israel define His bearing to the whole race in the finish of things: “*For a small moment, I have forsaken thee: in a little wrath, I have hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee.*” “*The days of thy mourning shall be ended.*”

While waiting for this great salvation, it will be of advantage to take the guidance contained in Psalm 91—a guidance which does not come out directly, but does so powerfully in an indirect way. Read without the discrimination supplied by facts, it might be made to teach the doctrine of Eliphaz, that righteous men will in all things flourish now. We know by quotation in the New Testament that the psalm applies to Christ, and here is where we shall be defended against the Eliphaz misinterpretation. It reads: “*There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.*” “*He shall give his angels charge concerning thee lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.*” From this, by itself, we should conclude that Christ would not be a sufferer. How false such a conclusion would have been, we know. The sufferings of Christ are the distinctest feature in the apostolic application of the prophecies to Christ. “*He was oppressed: he was afflicted . . . it pleased the Lord to bruise him: he hath put him to grief.*” What does this mean but his body broken, his blood shed? His words were fulfilled which foretold that he would be delivered into the hands of sinners and despitefully used and scourged and killed. Evil came very nigh his dwelling—how nigh is only fitly described in the language of another psalm, which foreshowed his sufferings, thus: “*Save me, O God, for the waters are come into my soul. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me.*” “*My soul is full of troubles. My life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go down unto the pit. I am as a man that hath no strength . . . mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction. Lord, I have called daily upon thee. I have stretched out my hands unto thee.*”

All this being true, is Psa. 91 false which says, “*No evil shall befall thee?*” Far from it. It is a question of the right time to apply it. It was not the right time when he was the babe of Bethlehem, for then he was not the fully developed Messiah. It was not the right time when he was the dutiful son in subjection to father and mother at Nazareth, for then he was only in course of training. It was not the right time when he was manifested to Israel by the ministry of John the Baptist, as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world, for he had still to go through that process described by Paul as “*learning obedience by the things which he suffered*” though he were a son (Heb. 5: 9). It was not the right time when he stood before Pilate, the “*despised and the rejected of men*”: for he had yet, “*for the joy set before him,*” to endure the cross and despise the shame, and “endure such contradiction of sinners against himself” (Heb. 12: 2–3). It was not when he was twelve years of age, nor when he was thirty, nor when he hung on the cross, that he could realise the promise that no evil should befall him. It was only after resurrection when, “*because he loved righteousness and hated iniquity, God anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows*” (Heb. 1:9). At that stage, the psalm applied absolutely: “*He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*”

What is true of Christ is true of all his brethren. Their present experience is an experience of evil. You cannot judge of God’s view of a man by that experience. You must wait the issue of things. The wicked prosper like the proverbial green bay tree, while the righteous are trodden into the ditch—

which is a great problem with the Eliphaz class. They stumbled over it in the case of Job, and they do so down to this very hour. You can hear to-day the very taunt which the Jewish leaders hurled at the Lord in the hour of his agony when he hung on the cross: "*He trusted in God that he would deliver him: let him deliver him if he will have him.*" You hear on all hands on the lips of a shallow populace the sort of comment that passed round when the tower of Siloam fell and killed eighteen people, "What sinners these must have been." They do not understand that all are sinners in greater or less degree, and that "*except they repent, they shall all likewise perish.*" They do not understand that "*many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all*"—that is, at last, when God's work is finished with them, and the wicked are no more.

We have to incessantly fortify ourselves against the false philosophy with which the air is full. The right philosophy of the case is a divine philosophy, and, therefore, a difficult philosophy for short-sighted fainting flesh and blood. Jeremiah found it a little difficult to understand; and therefore we need not marvel at our own difficulty. "*Righteous, art thou, O Lord,*" said he, presenting the difficulty, "*when I plead with thee: yet let me plead with thee of thy judgments. Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them: yea, they have taken root. They grow: yea, they bring forth fruit.*" There is a full answer in Psa. 37. The same answer is spread over the whole of the Scriptures. When we have fully apprehended it, and embraced it, we are at rest, and can patiently wait in the midst of the evil for the purposed rectification of all holy things. David, before us, was exercised in a similar way, and his consolation may be ours. He said the prosperity of the wicked troubled him. He said, "*They are not in trouble as other men. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. Therefore pride compasseth them as a chain. They set their mouth against the heavens. They say: How doth God know? It was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God. Then understood I their end. Thou hast set them in slippery places. They are brought into desolation as in a moment. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou wilt despise their image. Lo, they that are far from thee shall perish. But it is good for me to draw near to God. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.*"

(Sunday Morning No. 287 Christadelphian August 1897 by Bro. Roberts.)