

The Enmity and the Reconciliation

Our reading this morning—Mark 15—centers our attention upon the main object of our gathering here—the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus our Lord. The simple act of breaking of the bread, and partaking of it and the wine in memory of our beloved Redeemer, was given to us by the divine appointment and the expressed desire of our suffering Savior.

How much weight do the petitions of a dying man carry in the minds of those who love him? They are not forgotten by those who are addressed, and are seldom disobeyed. Of what great importance, then, is this act to those who love Christ and have become the beneficiaries of the result of his suffering! We read—

"And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the 12 apostles with him. And he said unto them,
"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."

Paul relays the message to us as an appointment to be kept as a memorial of Christ's sacrificial death, by all his disciples (1 Cor. 11:23). This memorial, then, is one given to us by the express desire of Christ in the hour of his suffering and anguish of soul.

It is an institution of the Divine Mind, made suitable for our spiritual needs. The institution centers our minds upon the nucleus of the divine arrangement provided for the reconciliation of man to his Creator.

From this memorial feast we can look back to the first records of Scripture and take knowledge of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. We view the serpent who was "more subtle than any beast of the field." We observe his words and their effect in the sentence of death upon man.

We see man's shame at his nakedness before God, and his false fig-leaf covering. And we consider the covering God provided in the skins of slain beasts, with the anti-type in the crucified Jesus as God's provision for the covering of man's nakedness.

And so, as we consider the curse put upon the serpent—

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

—our thoughts again return to our present position and our association around this memorial feast.

The poison venom of the serpent bite is seen in the enmity of the carnal mind, revealing itself in the fulness of its iniquity as Christ is taken by wicked hands and crucified—

"This is your hour, and the power of darkness."

If we look upon the slayers of Jesus as stiff-necked Israel alone, and not in the fuller view as the embodiment of the carnal and natural mind exhibited in its subtle and serpent wickedness, we are apt to overlook the full importance of the lesson.

It was the flesh against the Spirit. The seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent constitute the believing and unbelieving, independent of sect or nationality.

Paul said the NATURAL MIND is at enmity with God, and is not subject to Him—neither can be. It is natural of man to recognize his nakedness and seek a covering of his own choice. But all

natural, manmade coverings must be stripped away. The self-deceiving philosophising of the flesh, whatever form it may take, must be pierced, and by the searching light of the Spirit's revealed wisdom we must see the natural mind in its true nakedness and uncleanness.

This was the work for which Jesus sacrificed himself—to expose and condemn sin in the flesh, that its exceeding sinfulness may be manifested, and the beauty and superiority of God's righteousness and justice proclaimed.

"He loved not his life unto the death, but gave his back to the smiters and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and hid not his face from shame and spitting" (Isa. 50:6).

Coming again to our reading for today, then, we see sin unmasked in all its naked horribleness. It is indeed the "filling up the measure of their fathers"—

"That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar" (Matt. 23:35).

Here we see summarised the broad scope of the flesh-Spirit conflict that reached its apex at this fateful hour. And we do well to note, in harmony with the universal significance of the events enacted, that—although it was the JEWISH leaders who falsely accused him and took away his judgment and condemned him to death and desired the release rather of a rebellious murderer than he—it was the GENTILES, the Romans, the then-rulers and head of the great Image of the kingdoms of men, who mocked and scourged and spat upon and crucified him (Mark 10:34-35).

It was this open show of Sin-in-the-flesh, exposed in both Jew and Gentile, which can be styled the "works of the devil" which Christ came to destroy. A few moments thought on this open manifestation of sin-in-the-flesh, revealed in all its ugliness, will help us to realize what Jesus overcame and openly condemned. In Col. 2:15 it is written—

"Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

And in John 12:31-32, Jesus—following the Father's open announcement of the glorifying of His name in Christ—said to those who stood by—

"Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

With these facts before us, we can more perfectly grasp the full significance of the work Christ came to do in the sacrifice of himself. Having been fashioned in our likeness, or made like unto his brethren, he condemned sin in the flesh in every sense of the word. So completely was he master of his own sinful nature that he could say to his accusers—

"Which of you convinceth (convicteth) me of sin?" (Jn. 8:46).

Likewise he could truthfully say to his disciples—

"The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me."

Sin is condemned in his perfect obedience to the Father's will, in the chaste life he lived, and in the fearless condemnation of the sins of others—consummating in the deadly hostility of the serpent seed in nailing him, a righteous man, to the cross. His willing submission to this death, at the Father's command, was indeed his crowning act of obedience and righteousness.

We see him witnessing a "good confession" before Pilate. When Pilate said to him, Art thou a king, then?" Jesus answered:

"Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the Truth."

This, brethren and sisters, was indeed true. It was the Gospel—the covenants made to the fathers that he came to confirm and to seal with his blood. His whole life bore glorious and spotless witness to TRUTH.

Thus in some small way we can see what Jesus accomplished in his perfect obedience even unto the cross. It made it possible for God to righteously raise him from the dead for the great work of bringing all things to perfection.

"He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

It was more than an assurance that God had appointed him as the Judge of all mankind. It was an endorsement and glorification and vindication of Christ's righteousness in every word and deed, and thus an open condemnation of sin in the flesh, centered and culminating in the serpent-seed's act of crucifying and rejecting the Prince of Glory.

"Him ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it."

It was not possible that death could triumph over righteousness, for righteousness is life and light—

"In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

—B. W. R.
