

A NEW AND LIVING WAY

Read Hebrews Chpt. 10. The chapter which has been read this morning from the epistle to the Hebrews is evidently based upon something which has gone before. With that something we are familiar. It is the history of the nation of Israel, especially the events connected with the commencement of that history. They were brought out of Egypt by Moses, and carried through the wilderness, where they received from God a law—a law which necessarily recognised that the human race was sinful—sinful at its foundation head, or rather after the partaking of the forbidden fruit, and sinful also in its perpetuation, in that all Adam's descendants were transgressors. God designed that law to fix this on the memory of the children of Israel, and thereby impress them with their dependence on Him in order that He might be recognised, and that they might not forget that forgiveness was to be obtained only in the way appointed by Him. The apostle styles that condition of things "*a shadow*." We all know what a shadow is; it has form, but no substance, and is therefore useful to present an idea of that which is substantial. So was the law. It is accordingly spoken of by Paul in the second of Romans as "*the 'form' of knowledge and of the truth*," a definition which we should bear in mind when thinking upon the subject. Do we want to understand more fully the "*good things*" that God has given us in Christ? They are presented to us in a "*shadow*" in the Mosaic Law, and a study of that shadow will teach us more accurately the things in the New Testament concerning Christ. The "*good things*" which were to "*come*" find their substance in him. He is the Head, and it is in consequence of that substance having been given that we find ourselves in the position we occupy this morning. While calling this to mind, we have to mourn the fact that those to whom the shadow was in the first place given do not appreciate the substance. With what perversity which characterised them from the beginning they adhere to that shadow which God has made void. But the Gentiles who are so ready to condemn the Jews, are no better. Take, for example the Romish Church. It pretends to have Christ really present in the bread and wine, which it styles, "*the Sacrifice of the Mass*." The Gentiles endeavour to transform a symbol into the reality, and the Jews cling to a divine shadow after God has made it of no effect. Let us take care that we do neither. Let us not cling to the shadows. There are more shadows than the law. The world is a shadow; we are shadows. The Psalmist says,

"My days are like a shadow that declineth."

Let us have our minds fixed upon the substance. Two courses lie before us, and in the end we must reap according to that which we have sown.

The apostle proceeds to elaborate this reference to the shadowy character of the law by reminding his readers of the annual remembrance of sins. According to the law the Jews were required to offer up sacrifice for every class of sin; and in addition, supposing every sin were atoned for, there came a day in each year when it was necessary for the high priest to make atonement in the Most Holy for himself and the nation. Year after year it was repeated, and therefore the apostle reasons, and it is but a logical conclusion—that the yearly remembrance of those sins is in itself evidence that they were not completely taken away by the shadowy offerings.

Having referred to the typical atonement, he calls attention to the substance. "*Wherefore when 'he' cometh into the world.*" Who is the "*He*"? There is no mention of him in this chapter, but there is in the preceding one. Going back to the closing verses we find reference made to him:

“So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.”

This then is the “he” who “cometh” into the world. He came into the world and fulfilled the prediction of the Psalmist:—*“Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sins Thou hast had no pleasure.”* Well would it have been if the Jew had remembered this.

You know from the record of their doings and God’s condemnation of them, that they exalted sacrifice into a place which it was not intended to occupy. An illustration of this is seen in the case of Saul, whose conduct caused Samuel to say: -

“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”

The same principle is expressed in certain words in the prophecy of Jeremiah (ch. 7:22).

“I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

That sounds strange in view of the fact that God commanded the bringing of burnt offerings and sacrifices. Substitute the words “for the sake of” instead of “concerning” and the meaning is made clear.

“I spake not . . . (for the sake of) burnt offerings or sacrifices, but this thing I commanded them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.”

Now in Christ we see one who did that. He never had to offer up an animal sacrifice. True, the Mosaic ceremonies were attended to in connection with him, but that was not on account of personal transgression. Christ’s position is represented in the words of the verse—

“Then said I, lo I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do Thy will, O God.”

He did that will perfectly; and because he did so, the sacrifice he was able to offer in his own person was an acceptable one, and put the seal to the typical sacrifices. Proceeding further, the apostle connects the doing of that will with believers:

“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

That is to say; Christ did God’s will; through his doing that will we are sanctified; separated in the first instance; and made completely holy. It was of sufficient power to give us sanctification in its most exalted and perfect condition, namely, that of receiving glory, honour, and immortality. We need not to offer up from time to time. We come this morning simply to bring to memory Christ’s offering. It is not a sacrifice; the Table is not an altar; we are not priests of the Levitical order. In one sense we are priests, to offer spiritual sacrifices of praise and prayer acceptable to our Father in heaven:

“By him (Christ), therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to distribute forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

The apostle, having thus elaborated his argument, bases upon it this exhortation: -

“Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the

veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

To realise the meaning of that passage we require to understand something of the shadows which he mentions. The writer was familiar with them, and so were those to whom he wrote. If, therefore, we wish to understand the passage, we must possess the same knowledge. The tabernacle was a structure, the first part of which was for the ordinary priests; but the second part for the high priest alone; and into that, even he only entered on one day each year. Are we invited to go into a similar place when the apostle exhorts us to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus? Christ has gone into heaven itself; how can we enter there? By faith. We know he is there. We are told that he is our priest. We are told that he mediates for us, and therefore we know it and should act upon it. But in what state of mind are we to enter? "*With boldness*"—not timidity—not with fear, like that which Israel exhibited when the mount shook. We are to go freely. There is no restriction; we can go any time—

"The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry."

The ears of the Lord are always open. But we must approach Him in the right way. There are certain conditions of approach, and those are indicated here. One has already been referred to: "*full assurance of faith.*" There is another: "*with a true heart.*" That implies the existence of a false heart. What is it to have "*a true heart*"? Is it not to have our affections fixed upon Him, to love what He loves, to hate what He hates, much after the manner indicated in the salutation of Jehu to Jonadab, the son of Rechab (2 Kings 10:15)?

"Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?"

Let us come to God then with this "*true heart*" and "*full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*" The mention of sprinkling carries us back to the past; it reminds us that when we were immersed we passed through the laver, that our hearts were sprinkled from the evil conscience which we previously had, that we were invested with a robe of righteousness, after the manner of the Aaronic priests, and that we were thereby placed in a position to approach by the new and living way. The veil of the temple was rent in twain at the death of Christ to signify that it was no longer the way of approach towards God. In drawing near by this new and living way, we are exhorted to "*hold fast without wavering.*" Why should we waver? Flesh and blood is strong, but flesh and blood must be curbed. You say, it is difficult. So it is; the "*Truth*" is difficult. It is a matter of "*overcoming.*" To whom are the promises made in the second and third of Revelation?

"To him that overcometh."

"He that overcometh shall inherit all things."

Therefore we must set ourselves to work with determination in a practical manner, to overcome the inclination of the flesh in every direction. If we do that we shall not waver. God does not waver. If, therefore, our heart be with Him we shall not waver. We have an illustration of His faithfulness in connection with His planting the nation of Israel in Canaan.

"There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel, all came to pass"

(Joshua 21:45).

So it will be with us. Those “*good things*” are beyond our perception at the present time. They will operate for our eternal good according to the extent to which the mind is allowed to dwell upon them. We are not simply to read. We are told to meditate; and to meditate not upon what has been only, but on those things which are to be. Where are they given? God presents in His Word a picture of good things in store for those who love and obey Him. Writing to the Romans, the apostle says (ch. 8:28-31),

“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified. What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”

What a power we have on our side! Are we fainthearted? God reveals Himself to us as a God of strength, the God of Israel. Let us go to Him to obtain that strength. The apostle says in the passage we have lately read in the Hebrews:

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

A ‘*throne of grace*’ is a throne of favour. There are thrones of favour now on earth. The throne of England is one, and the queen is styled “Her Most Gracious Majesty.” The terms ‘grace’ and ‘gracious’ are often used in connection with her throne. But how small the grace in comparison with the grace of God. We have already tasted thereof. That should be a reason for relying on Him for the future. Those who have tried it have found it a strong support. His promises have to be tried in order to find that God is a present God, a living God, that He acts now as He did in the past: not as openly, but as really. If we persevere we shall be strengthened. We shall find that as one difficulty is overcome, we shall proceed in “full assurance of faith,” to overcome further difficulties, just as David did. He said on the occasion of his encounter with Goliath,

“The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine.”

Our difficulties may be to us quite as great as that was to David; but if we look to God we shall be able to overcome, and then we can say with the apostle at the close of the 8th of Romans,

“Nay in all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor principalities nor powers, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

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