

HUMILITY AND SORROW PRECEDE HONOUR AND JOY

Once in seven days is not too often to come to this breaking of bread. We are just about ready for another refreshing by the time we have had six days of the present evil state of existence. Whatever sphere we may move in—whatever may be the nature of the occupation we have to follow—our experience is common in this respect, that God is dimmed by our intercourse with man, and our duty and hope require refurbishing after six days of worldly toil. This refurbishing we get at the Table of the Lord.

Attendance thereat is essentially a memorial exercise—a bringing to mind of things that bring comfort and strength in their remembrance, but which are liable to lose their power by the forgetfulness more or less incident to all human faculty. All the things of which we are thus reminded are comforting. We are reminded of Christ's love, of the Father's love who sent Christ, and of the practical form which that love takes in the forgiveness of our sins, and in the arranging of that true feast of fat things which is to be spread for the brethren of Christ at his coming. When we have a clear and abiding view of all these things we are comforted.

We need the comfort. We are often in great depths, like David—some in one way and some in another. We have all matters in hand that are apt to drag us down and keep us down. We come to the Table of the Lord and get eased in our trouble. We even get to the point of being thankful for trouble. Trouble is good for us. It breaks the spell of this natural life, draws us nearer to God, and throws us more and more upon the Kingdom of God as our portion. David speaks of some who are "*not in trouble as other men are—who have more than heart can wish.*" We may know of such, if we are wise we will not envy them. Even in a natural sense, they have not the joy in life they seem to have. Their very abundance is often a weariness. Things cease to please, and ennui afflicts. As Solomon says,

"The abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep, but the sleep of the labouring man is sweet."

And how calamitous is that situation of which Jesus has to say "*How hardly*" shall they who are in it enter the Kingdom. To the poor, the gospel is preached: "*blessed*" therefore, "*be ye poor; yours is the Kingdom of God.*" The rich, in their unbelief and scorn, say "We will let you have the Kingdom if you let us have the present world"—a piece of pleasantries to smile at just now, but with what a side of sternness when the Kingdom is truly come. They are truly well off who are poor in this world if they are rich in faith. But we require helping in the matter. We are shortsighted and would choose what was not best for us. We are not very different from children in this respect. We would prefer what is immediately pleasant. We would choose to be well and free from care and affliction, and to have plenty of all things. In a sense, it would be a healthy and rational choice. Only, as things are on earth for the moment, it would be premature.

God intends His children to have all that the heart can desire at last. He does not intend to keep them perpetually bound in affliction and iron. The wealth of the sinner, the honour of all men, and everlasting joy are waiting them at last. But there is a time for everything. Now is the time for preparing for that. Before honour is humility; before joy is sorrow. We are being prepared for the one by the other. Unspeakable gladness is coming; and we are being prepared for it in part, by the evil we are now passing through. The day will come when we shall be thankful to God for that evil as we cannot feel now, —a day of which the Psalm (126) read this morning gives us a sort of reflex. The Psalm may refer to the return of the Babylonish captives but there is a greater deliverance coming, to which, therefore, it will have more forcible application.

"When the Lord turned back the captivity of Zion, we were like those that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

A Christian of the popular type would read this without feeling it had anything in it for him. Most of us can recollect that day when it would have struck no chord in our hearts; but the Truth has changed this for us. There is nothing bearing upon the salvation of Israel, that has not also a bearing upon us;

for by the gospel, in the obedience thereof, we have in a sense become "*Hebrew of the Hebrews*"—Israel in a truer and more living sense than the sons of Abraham according to the flesh. We can use the language of another Psalm with a heartiness never manifested by the "*Jew outwardly*"—

"Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion."

"When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of His people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad."

In this joy we shall partake above all others as the brethren of Israel's King. Then shall we be "*like those that dream*." When a thing is so good as to be inexpressibly enjoyable, it seems like a dream. This will be the experience of the saints. But to attain to this experience, we must have trouble now. Trouble is the seed from which the flower of gladness springs. A man who is full can never be brought to the state of being very glad about anything. To reap in joy, we must sow in tears. As the 5th verse of this Psalm says—

"They that sow in tears will reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

This is our whole case understood rightly. The sowing must be taken in a larger sense than what we understand by sowing the good seed of the Kingdom. The publication of the Truth is only one part of the sowing. The sowing is a larger sowing. It is the sowing of Paul's declaration, that—

"He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

It is a sowing in tears.

Sorrow is inseparable from a life of waiting on God and doing His commandments: because such a life is a life of self-denial—a life of reproach, a man who earnestly identifies himself with the hopes and principles and duties of the Truth in this generation (who lets his light in these things "shine before men") is certain to be hated by those who belong to this world, and he is certain to be isolated from much in this world that gives comparative joy. It is, as Jesus said,

"Ye shall weep and lament but the world shall rejoice."

Our comfort in the midst of it is that it is not for ever.

"I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

"If the world hate you," said the Lord—(and he says it will do so if we are faithful to him, and that it will only love us if we make ourselves of the world, for the world loveth its own).

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."

It is surely an honour and almost a pleasure to be hated in the company of the Lord Jesus.

"Now are we sons of God," says John, *"therefore, the world knoweth us not, even as it knew him not."*

If a man is content to be a Son of God, he will be content to be regarded as Christ was regarded; he was regarded as a madman, and certainly, in all points, a man in whose ways the world could find no pleasure. To be so regarded is a deep affliction; it is part of the "*tears*" that belong to the sowing of the precious seed.

Let a man love God with all his heart and strive to act on all divine principles in all his ways, and he will experience the bitterness of being ignored as Christ was—"*despised and rejected of men*." But God's ways are beautiful and wise. It is only for a time. There is such a thing as "*reaping in joy*." They are no vain words. The day of bountiful sheaves will come—a day in which the exact outcome of present dishonour borne for Christ and present profitless work done for his name will be experienced in joy that will fill our mouths with laughter and our lips with singing. It will seem a dream, but it will be a very practical reality which, once come, will never fade away. Not only the circumstances causing joy will remain, but the appreciation of them will be perennial. This will be something new in all senses. If we have joy now, it subsides, whatever its cause and however good. Mortal mind gets accustomed to all circumstances, and so at last loses the power to be glad about that which gave great joy at first. But it will not be with mortal powers that we shall rejoice in the goodness which God hath laid up in store for them that love Him. "*This mortal*" will have ceased to be mortal. It will have put on the immortal, and this must necessarily mean a great change as regards capacity for enjoyment. The analogy of present experience points to this. We know what it is in the

present state to be in different conditions of physical vigour, and we know the great difference between the weak, cloudy, vapid, unhappy times of low health, when "*the grasshopper is a burden,*" and the times of comparatively joyous health and elasticity. In these latter times, we get joy out of what is a trouble to us at other times. And so, when this mortal is no longer a fragile organism, depending for vigour upon the precarious supplies of the electrical fluid yielded by stomach and blood, when it is so changed that Spirit is latent in every atom and aglow in every fibre, available for every exertion, and for any amount of continuousness of exertion, it must needs be that mental relish will be always at its keenest, and its joy necessarily a thing "*everlasting.*"

Part of the joy of deliverance is the memory of peril. From this, we may conclude that the lessons and recollections of this our stormful probation will be permanently fixed in the mental mirror, and yield the perpetual satisfaction that results from the contrast which mortal memory is incapable of long enjoying. It will be as if some of the manufacturing processes connected with the trade were applied to the mental mechanism; as when a "fixing solution" secures on the photographer's glass the image which would otherwise fade away, or the potter's glaze secures the colours of his china ware; or the plater's electric stream the precious deposit on the surface of inferior metals. The Spirit of God will show us wonders in this way that we have not dreamt of, and fill our mouth with laughter and our lips with singing. We shall never be tired of the gladness or forgetful of our indebtedness to God for the goodness which will be ours through Christ in those happy days.

Is there not everything in such a prospect to encourage in that patient continuance in well doing which belongs to our present lot? If there is anything to mar its satisfaction, it may sometimes be the thought that so few of earth's multitude will attain to it. It may give a twinge of distress to think that if we may be chosen for such a great salvation, so many will not. We are apt to painfully wonder why we should be brought into relation with such unspeakable goodness, and so many left to grope and perish in the darkness that covers all the earth. This thought has been so painful with some minds as to deter them from embracing their own privileges, and led them to let a salvation slip that does not seem intended for all. We may quell such thoughts by the exercise of reason. We must remember, first, that the whole affair belongs to God, who is working it out "*according to the counsel of His own will;*" and who has a perfectly good reason for everything He does or omits to do, if we could only know it. The words of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth suggest some help on the point.

"There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent save unto Sarepta, a city of Zidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the times of Elisha, the prophet, and none of them were cleansed save Naaman the Syrian."

So we may say with reference to the matter in hand. There are many poor and needy people in the earth, but only unto some is the healing of the gospel sent. It is God's work, and God's wisdom regulates it. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. Cannot we, therefore, trust Him to work out His plan rightly? It really comes to this. Here we find rest at last. We may be quite sure that we shall see the wisdom of God's ways at last, and His wisdom, therefore, in not inviting many people that we might like to see invited. If we do not see it now, it is because we cannot see at all. The people we know are known only to us as they appear. To judge competently, we should require to see them as God in His omniscience sees them. As God said to Samuel in the house of Jesse when he went to anoint David "*Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart,*" and it is not every heart of which He can make suitable use. Exercising our minds in this way, we shall find it easy to suspend judgment on problems that would otherwise distress; and be left free to bend our whole energies to the part that practically belongs to us in the place we occupy in God's scheme of things.

Do our own part faithfully. This is the sum of all wisdom for us and the end of all anxiety. What that part is we learn from the revelation of His will in the Word of His inspiration. We are here only for a short day to do it. Our little day is infinitesimal in the countless ages before and behind. What are seventy years in the midst of seventy millions and seventy times seventy millions? James well says,

"What is your life? It is but a vapour that appeareth for a very little while and then vanisheth away."

It is only wisely used in applying the heart to the wisdom of God which begins with His fear. Only thus can we obtain a place in the endless aeons that are rolling. If some say, "We don't want a place in the endless aeons that are rolling, it makes us giddy," let us not be like them. Talk like this is the talk of folly. There is just this glimmer of sense in it, that the prospect of endless ages is a little liable to stagger human faculty: but the feeling is an illusion of the imagination. The ages do not come upon us in their bulk. Time in them will be like time now—viz., one day at a time. The difference will be that time will always go on in a sunshine of existence that will never dim. Nobody would want time to end under such conditions. The endlessness will be no oppression, but rather a constant delight.

Such a project is on all hands considered utopian. The way to confute that thought is to determine the simple question: Has God promised it? If He has, there's an end of it. If God who has made sun, moon, and stars has promised to bring a morning without clouds on the earth, and a day without end, it is not the attitude of reason to say either that the thing promised is too good to be true, or that He will fail in bringing it to pass.

It is only a cloudy state of intellect that doubts and hesitates and maunders in this matter; and can we wonder that such a mood of mind should be offensive to Him who has condescended to utter His voice in kindness upon the earth! Need we marvel if it is written that "*without faith, it is impossible to please God?*" But it is ours to obey the exhortation which says to us, "*hold fast your profession . . . cast not away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward.*" For only a very few years shall we behold the vanity that is now under the sun. Death will shortly blot the scene from our view if the Lord's return should not end it before then; and in one moment shall we seem to pass from the present night to the long-promised day.

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