

## THROUGH THE WINDOWS OF THE WORD

We never tire of the fresh air and the beautiful light, or grow weary of the blue sky or the face of nature. Wholesome food is always acceptable to a healthy palate. There is something in the adaptations of things that makes these things perennial in their power to satisfy. So it is with the things of the Spirit of God to the new man formed within us by the Truth. They are always fresh and sweet to the taste. They are always beautiful and holy and strengthening. They never grow stale or pall upon the spirits. They are adapted to our highest desires. They alone can supply the demand of our ultimate aspirations. This is true of the mental relations of this mortal state. How much more must it be true of the Spirit state in which all earthly affinities will have been absorbed in the wonderful physical transmutation which changes this corruptible and mortal body into the incorruptible and immortal.

For this emancipation we are longing. For it we are preparing. We would not know how to prepare if the Spirit of God had not instructed us in the Word written under its inspiration. With this Word in our hands and hearts, we do know. We are commanded to come together thus to the breaking of bread. This is one part of our preparation. By this we are kept in constant memory of Christ, and constant sympathy with him; and by this we are trained to that idea and habit of loving assembly in praise of God, through our Lord Jesus, which will be the normal relation of the perfect state for which we are hoping. We are commanded also to "*pray always*," by which God is pleased, and our minds gradually opened to the full and living sense of His reality. Above all we are commanded to attend upon the diligent and regular reading of the Word which alone can enlighten our darkness, and bring us into fitness for a place in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Our readings on such occasions always provide us with the material of true edification. Wherever we read, we seem to have a window opened through which we can see the divine work in the earth as contrasted with the mere work of man to which we naturally belong. We are most of the time shut in by high walls to the mere work of men. If we see nothing but this work, we shall be entirely misled as to the meaning of life, and fatally misguided as to the way to use it. A look through the window will show us something going on outside of first importance for us to know. Let us call the chapters so many windows along the extended route of a procession. There are many windows, but through whichever we look, it is the same procession we see, though a different part. It is the work of God proceeding at some stage or other.

In Numbers, we have the organization of the camp of Israel in the wilderness. It might seem at first as if this had no interest or use for us—a thing of the past—an inherently transient thing, which having answered its purpose during Israel's passage from Egypt to the promised land, could be of no possible service to those who came after. This must be a wrong thought in view of the elaborate record it has received among those "*whatsoever things*" which have been "*written for our learning*." That it is a wrong thought we discover when we apply our minds to the subject itself. The mere circumstance of a large travelling body of people being arranged by divine direction would impart to that arrangement a supreme interest—as a thing to study—a thing certain to be characterised by ingenuity and wisdom—a thing to be delighted in by those who admire the works of God, and take pleasure in seeking them out. But when, in addition to this, we find that a typical significance was stamped upon all these arrangements, in foreshadowing of God's ultimate will concerning man, it is manifest that a subject of great depth and richness is opened out to the mind in these Mosaic specifications.

On the first head, we may note the perfect symmetry and convenience of all the arrangements. There was a system observed throughout. The whole congregation was sub-divided into tribes, consisting of descendants respectively of the twelve sons of Jacob. These tribes were grouped in three's, so as to make four camps of three tribes each, each camp having its own standard, the lion, the man, the ox, and the eagle. The camps were named after the leading tribe in each camp—Judah, Reuben, Ephraim, and Dan. The four camps were arranged in a square around the tabernacle in the centre—the camp of Judah forming the east side, the camp of Reuben the south, the camp of Ephraim the west, and the camp of Dan the north. Inside these four camps, lying between them and the tabernacle in the centre, were four minor camps, consisting of the tribe of Levi, separated and

sanctified for the priestly service in four sections, according to the sons of Levi—Gershon, Kohath, and Merari—the family of Moses and Aaron forming the fourth.

The order of march was accommodated to these divisions. When the time arrived to strike their tents, Aaron's sons blew an alarm on silver trumpets (made for the purpose). At this signal, the camp on the east (consisting of the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun) broke up and got on the march. At the same time, the Levites were getting the tabernacle down in the order of their service; and first went the Merarites with the sockets, pillars and boards, and then the Gershonites with the curtains, cords, and coverings. When these had marched, another alarm on the trumpets summoned the south camp, the camp of Reuben, which marched, then marched the Kohathites, bearing the ark, the altars and holy vessels, for which, when the march ended, the Gershonites and Merarites had got the tabernacle erected in readiness. Next a blast of the trumpets brought forward the west and then the north camp, all halting in the same order at the end of their journey, and pitching in the original form of a square round the tabernacle.

No better arrangement could be imagined for the guidance of an immense body of people on the march. It bears the mark of divine wisdom on the face of it. But consider the spiritual significance which it yields. Here is a divine organization of human life in a national capacity; and what is its most conspicuous feature? The tabernacle of the divine presence in the midst—**GOD IN THE CENTRE**—the pivot upon which the whole system turns—the source of all direction and law. How great a contrast is this to human systems! How complete the lesson that human life can never be and will never be what it ought to be until God's authority in visible administration is the heart and kernel of human society upon earth. It is nothing less than the Kingdom of God in miniature. Christ enthroned at Jerusalem, and ruling by the hands of his own immortal friends in all the earth, will soon establish the Father's name as the controlling power of human life—a fertilising and ennobling ideal that will generate joy and beauty everywhere. The antitypical tabernacle of God will thus be with men as the typical was with Israel; and they shall be His people, as Israel was; and, what Israel did not experience, God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and at last, there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying.

We look at the perfect order extending to the smallest minutiae of the Mosaic encampment, and we may conclude with certainty that the same principle of fitness and method will be carried out in the arrangement of the heavenly encampment in the Age to come. The saints will be a multitude that no man can number, but everyone will have his place and his work. There will be no loose or unallotted parts in the system—no surplusage—no misfits—no waste power—no confusion. Everything will fit perfectly. We see the salient points of this exactness of order when we see the Holy Land, the Lord's portion (Zech. 2:10); Jerusalem the Lord's throne (Jer. 3:17); Jesus the occupant of the throne (Luke 1:32); the twelve apostles, heads of the twelve tribes under him (Mat. 19:28); and the saints exercising dominion according to "*their works*" (Rev. 2:26; 22:12; Luke 19:16-17).

These features stand out like the spires and towers of a city seen from a distance. We cannot make out the details, but we know when we behold a city from a distance that the details of streets and houses are there, and that when we get to the city, we shall find out these details down to the very persons and their affairs. So we know from these indications of the leading features of the Kingdom, considered in the light of the perfect organization of the details of the Mosaic camp, that when we get there, we shall find everything arranged in a perfect system of order and fitness.

Then as we look at the camp in the wilderness, we find it a prophecy. It tells us the connection in which the goodness of God is to be manifested on the earth. The divine encampment which we see is a camp composed of the twelve tribes of Israel. So it was under the Law, and so under the gospel when the Gentiles were invited to become Jews. So it was at the beginning, and so at the end when the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are inscribed on the gates of new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12). So it has always been in the history of the earth; so it always will be. The work of God is inseparably associated with the race of Israel, "*to whom pertaineth the adoption and the glory and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises*" (Rom. 9:4).

In the past, the kingdom of Israel was the Kingdom of God (2 Chr. 13:8); and in the future, the Kingdom of God will be the kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6; Micah 4:8; Isa. 60:14). First, the natural and then the spiritual, —this is the rule both of God's political work, and of His individual work. All are not Israel that are of Israel, still, there has always been throughout their generations, a remnant according to the election of grace, and these will in the end be all gathered in one glorious polity of

righteousness, peace, strength, wealth, honour, life and joy everlasting—God in their midst forever, and the congregation wholly sacrificed to Him.

All this and much more is involved in the picture displayed to the mind's eye as we read the full particulars given us in Numbers of the organization of Israel under Moses as they came out of the wilderness. So much for the first of today's three windows. The second window shows us Solomon enthroned, and speaking wisdom in the Proverbs to all who have ears to hear. This wisdom "*cometh from above*." It is the effluence of inspiration. It is no more Solomon's wisdom than the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream was Joseph's (Gen. 41:16), or the disclosure of Nebuchadnezzar's vision was Daniel's (Dan. 2:27-30). God gave this wisdom to Solomon (1 Kings 4:29); and Paul informs us that the utterance of it in the Proverbs is the divine voice of exhortation "*speaking unto us as unto children*" (Heb. 12:5). Consequently, what we see as we look through this window is God speaking for the enlightenment of men. What does He say?

*"My son attend to My words: incline thine ears to My sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; KEEP THEM in the midst of thine heart."*

Brethren, this is what we are busy doing. We are here for no other reason than that we desire to attend to the Word of God and to keep fast hold of His instruction. In doing this, we are doing the most foolish thing under the sun in the estimation of our neighbours. There is nothing less to the popular taste than what has been said in commandment and promise; but if we are wise we will not be deterred by the popular distaste. The world chooses that which there is no substance in. Destruction and misery are in their ways. We will rather choose what Mary chose, which Jesus describes as "*that good part which shall not be taken away*"—a part which has just the reverse ending to the part of ungodly men; not the destruction and misery, but salvation and joy. Even now, it is the highest satisfaction attainable to mortals on earth, the answer of a good conscience, the confidence of God's friendship and the hope of good things to come. As the darkness of life increases, the hope of the gospel grows brighter. It is ahead of our path like a great light illuminating the horizon, increasing in brightness as we draw nearer to it. Even now, godliness is the best portion for men; but what shall we say about "then" when we have done with this vain life, and when we have placed our feet on the threshold of eternal day? Our poor minds fail to conceive the glory which God hath prepared for them that love Him. It is our wisdom then to cling closely to the words addressed to us in the Proverbs,

*"They are life unto those that find them and health to all their flesh."*

Our third window lets us look out upon Jesus walking among men. He is near Jericho, and passing along the road, accompanied by a crowd. Ahead of him, a little man has climbed up a tree to get a good view of Jesus as he should pass. When he reaches the tree, Jesus stands still and calls up to the little man,

*"Zacchaeus, come down, for today I must abide at thy house."*

Zacchaeus comes down with alacrity, and leads the way to his house. The religious critics of Jesus among the crowd say that Jesus has gone to be the guest of a man that is a sinner. But Jesus knew better. When they got to the threshold of the house, Zacchaeus, recognising Christ's authority as the standard and the judge of righteousness, gives humble account of himself before accepting the great honour of entertaining Christ under his roof:

*"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor: and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."*

Christ's response is the expression of satisfaction with this account.

*"This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham."*

(Jesus had said before that the children of Abraham were those who "*did the deeds of their father Abraham*," whence we may note that not faith only, but the works of faith commend a man to Christ). The people standing around, who heard this speech, concluded that "*the Kingdom of God would immediately appear*." No wonder; "*this day is salvation come*."

*"The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

We would all have been likely to have taken the same impression had we heard such things from Christ's own actual mouth. So "*he added and spake a parable*" to correct their wrong impression:

*"A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return."*

Living in our age, and looking back, we can see how signally the parable has been fulfilled. The departure of Jesus is not the only thing we see, but his absence “*for a long time,*” as he said in another place. We are nearing the end of the long time, and therefore the end of the parable has a special interest.

*“He commanded those servants to be called unto him to whom he had given the money.”*

Judgment at his coming—this is what we have to look for, a standing before his judgment seat that we may “*give account,*” and receive “*according to our works.*” It is important that we have this always in view. The account will refer to the events of this unexciting interval of trial, and not to the feelings we may feel when we stand before the presence of his glory. Every one will be painfully attentive and deferential then. But that will go for nothing in the decisions that will be given. It is the account of what we are now doing that will be in question. This account must be a good account to receive the Lord’s approbation. He will not say “*well done, good and faithful servant*” if the doing has not been well and the servant has not been good and faithful. Orthodox theology has obscured this as well as many other things. It has confounded the justification of a sinner by faith with the acceptance of a saint by works. A justified sinner has to “*work out his own salvation*” by a “*patient continuance in well doing*”—“*enduring to the end.*” If he trust to his justification—that is, to the forgiveness of sin which he receives when he obeys the Truth—if after receiving this forgiveness, he walks after the flesh, and is again entangled and overcome in the pollutions of the world, his latter end is worse than the beginning. It were better for him not to know the way of righteousness than after knowing it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto him (2 Peter 2:20). So says the Word of inspiration which we may safely place against all the smooth uncertainties of “learning” and the pleasing lies of superstition. But let a man faithfully serve Christ, adopting his commandments as the law of life, and speaking right and left according to due opportunity of “*the glorious majesty of his Kingdom,*” he may have “*boldness in the day of judgment.*” For though no man be perfect in this imperfect state, the sins of faithful servants, confessed and forsaken, are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who is their high priest who ever liveth to make intercession for them. And the faithful service is accepted as the measure of the degree of exaltation to be conferred in the great day to which the Lord makes such frequent reference in his last message to John:

*“Behold I come quickly; my reward is with me, to give to every one of you according as your works shall be.”*

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