

DRAWN OF GOD BY THE WORD

It is curious to think of the line of connection that stretches away from the Table we surround this morning to that other Table at which 1,850 years ago, the Lord said,

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

This meeting is a direct off-shoot of that. If that meeting had not been held, we should never have been present at this; and if there had not been a connecting agency all the while, between, this could never have taken place. Our never having held this meeting would have mattered nothing to those belonging to the other end of the line. It would have mattered much to us and those who may be influenced or affected by what we do. It belongs to the chain of causation that brings us from darkness to light, and prepares us for a place in the system of things beyond, when the glory of the Lord will fill the earth, through the acknowledgement of an enlightened and immortal population.

It is more curious to think how little, comparatively speaking, has come from the powerful cause that was at work when the Lord, in the midst of his disciples, instituted this simple memorial. The authority of God was present to speak; the power of God was present to heal and to do great things, yet after 1,850 years, this is all as yet that has come of it, the patient obedience and cheerful hope of a few persons in the midst of a very numerous population in some countries white, in some countries black; in some, busy and prosperous; in others supine and stagnant; but in all heedless and unbelieving. Such a scantiness of result after such a lapse of time, might perplex and distress us if Christ himself had not prepared his disciples for it by such express intimations beforehand as we have been reading this morning from Paul’s letter to Timothy.

“The Spirit speaketh, expressing that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith.”

Concerning this *“some,”* Peter informs us by the same spirit that—

“Many shall follow their pernicious ways” (2 Peter 2:1-2).

How *“many,”* the visions shown to John in Patmos of *“things shortly to come to pass,”* give us an idea of:

“All the world wonders after the beast . . . power was given him over all kindreds and tongues and nations”

(Rev.13: 3-7).

This beast had to do with upholding of the Romish *“woman,”* *“with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.”* These particular foreshadowings were all blended in the general prophecy of Isaiah,

“Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people.”

We discover from other Scriptures that this state of things would last till put an end to by the Lord’s actual return to *“take to himself his own great power, and to reign.”*

Consequently, that which at first sight seems an extraordinary and staggering failure of this Divine institution becomes at last apparent as the normal and the right state of things. It would not have been in harmony with the foreshowing of the Scriptures had the world at this time been full of the light of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Such a state of things would have been pleasant to the friends of God, but it would not have been in place, and for everything there is a time and place. It would have been easy for God to have established an institution in the place of the absent Christ that would have put and kept the world in the path of true enlightenment. He could have appointed an immortal Melchizedec at Jerusalem with power to suppress error and rebellion in the way they were stamped out in the camp of Israel in the wilderness, at the beginning; and in the way they will be kept at bay on the earth under the powerful reign of Christ. But He doeth as pleaseth Him in His wisdom. He knows what He is aiming at, and the best method of getting at the object aimed at. If, therefore, He has appointed this breaking of bread—a perfectly voluntary compliance with His will, following in the wake of the enlightenment which the Scriptures, and the Scriptures alone, are capable of conferring—an enlightenment forced on no one, and which, humanly speaking, we might say, is left to take its chance among the frictions and fermentations of human whims and fancies, it is because such an agency is sufficient to accomplish the work proposed in the present stage of operations. That work has been defined by James, and is illustrated in every scriptural description, and every

scripturally recorded operation of the gospel, namely, to *“take out from among the Gentiles a people for His name.”* This people, when taken out, will be sufficiently numerous to rule the world with Christ in the happy day of promise; and sufficiently interesting to be an acceptable present to Christ, who will present them to himself in their collective capacity, as *“a glorious ecclesia, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.”*

We have had the happiness to be included in the call that takes this people out. The coming of the gospel to us, in the hearing and understanding thereof, is proof of our inclusion in the call. That all the sons and daughters of God are known to Him from the beginning does not in the least interfere with the fact that when the time comes to bring them to Himself, it is by the hearing and understanding of the gospel that they are so brought. All God’s ways are in harmony one with another, and all truth agrees. We need not trouble with the question: “Am I among the elect?” The question for us is: “Are we among those who believe the gospel, and desire the salvation of God with all our hearts, and strive to conform in all our ways to His expressed will?” This is a question to some extent within our knowledge and our power; and if we are able to say “Yes,” then are we justified in looking forward and upward with full assurance of hope; because the word of Christ is most plain in this connection.

“Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.”

Now if we “come,” that is enough; it is proof that we are among those of whom he speaks when he says,

“All that the Father hath given to me shall come to me.”

Again,

“Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.”

Some are troubled at that other saying,

“No man can come unto me except the Father who hath sent me draw him.”

They need not be troubled. No part of the Word can contradict any other part. Some imagine that they must become the subject of an invisible, irresistible, miraculous “drawing” that will impel them independently of their wills and independently of their understanding. This would be to set the Word against experience and against the Word itself. No man ever comes to Christ as the result of “taking into his head,” as we might say, through an occult and divine influence operating there. No man ever yet submitted to the requirements of the gospel without hearing the gospel and learning in a natural way what those requirements are, and if any man will reasonably consider the connection of Christ’s words, when he speaks of the Father “drawing” those who come to Him, he must come to the conclusion that this is the process that Jesus had before his mind when he so spoke, for what does he say immediately:

*“Every man, therefore, that hath **heard** and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me.”*

How do men hear and learn of the Father? Is it not by the word spoken? Is it not written:

“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God?”

And is this not in completest harmony with the whole apostolic work of preaching the gospel as *“the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth?”*

Is it not in harmony with Christ’s own words—

He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved?”

It may be asked, Why should Jesus speak of this process of hearing and believing the gospel as a drawing? Brethren and sisters, because it is a drawing. Have we not felt its power? Have we not been drawn to Christ? Have we not been attracted to him? What has done it? Is it not the Word heard, understood, and believed? It is even so. We must recognise the facts of the case. As rational beings, we are influenced by reason. Men drawn by knowledge are drawn much more thoroughly and permanently than men that are influenced by a feeling of which they can give no account. Let a man know that the house is on fire, and you will get him into the street much more effectually than by trying to mesmerise him into it.

But why should Jesus place the Father so prominently in the drawing as the Actor in the process? Here again, because it is even so. Salvation is the Father’s work. It is *“of His own purpose and grace,”* conceived *“before the world began.”* The gospel is the instrumentality by which He is pleased to work it out. If He had not made known His purpose, if He had not issued the invitation to the marriage feast of His Son, who could have come to Christ? Must not all men have remained in the

apathy and stagnation of native darkness? It is even so. Christ meant to emphasise the fact that men have no room for the glory in which it is so common for them to indulge—in matters of mind and matters of futurity, as well as matters of personal strength and rational power. Salvation is “*not of works, lest any man should boast.*” It is altogether God’s plan, of God’s initiative, of God’s grace, “*that no flesh should glory in His presence.*” If we come to Christ, it is God’s drawing, and not the result of our superior discernments and choice. If it had depended on this, we never should have emerged from our native mud of ignorance and hopelessness. What Christ said to his disciples is true of all his people.

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.”

But then the gospel does not draw some? True. There must be an intelligent and responsive ear before the communications of intelligence can be effectual. Whence come these? My friend, all things are of God, in their proper relation. If God have not given you capacity to understand, then no amount of wisdom-teaching will enter your heart; but if you have the capacity, then the gospel is the Father’s voice addressed to that capacity; and if the two are brought into connection, the Father by the one draws the other, and the result is as appointed. If a man believe and love the gospel, and subject himself to its demand, then he has the proof in himself that he is called and drawn. Let him rest on the words of Christ:

“Let him that is athirst come and take of the water of life freely.”

That is our blessed position this morning. We are hungering after the good things of God’s revealed purpose. We have heard of them; we have believed them; we have embraced them; and we are seeking to subject ourselves to the Father’s requirements; why then should we hold back in the least from the full and perfect consolation? Why should we not heartily rejoice in hope of the glory of God? Is it not so, that—

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have access into this grace wherein we stand?” (Rom. 5:1).

Brethren and sisters, these things cannot be gainsaid. Let us act on the confidence of them. Let us not be perturbed at the darkness that reigns around us as if it were some strange and unaccountable circumstance. Let us not be intimidated out of our joy and confidence by the cry that it is uncharitable to be sure about the Truth, and that “*no lie is of the Truth,*” as John says. As men and women who have attained to a knowledge of the Truth, we are addressed by Paul when he says—

“Ye are all the children of the light and of the day. Therefore let us not sleep as do others. Let us who are of the day be sober.”

Let us “*not cast away our confidence which hath great recompense of reward.*”

The knowledge of the Truth is not without its drawbacks. It puts us out of fit with the people and the state of things around us. This is far from agreeable or advantageous for the present time. Nevertheless, it is a privilege when rightly estimated. It is precisely the experience of the first disciples. Jesus said in prayer—

“I have given them Thy Word and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world even as I am not of the world.”

Jesus plainly said to them,

“The time cometh when whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.”

It is a privilege to fare as Jesus and the apostles fared, even to take no higher view. But there is a higher view. It has pleased God to appoint trial as the preliminary to exaltation. We may not like it, but we may be quite sure it is wise. Our judgment in the matter can only waver in the actual hour of suffering. With a sufficiently wide sweep of the eye, it is impossible not to see that tribulation is a splendid preparation for glory. Does it not make us more humble and sensible than we should be if we had nothing but that which is agreeable in our experience? Does it not enable us more easily to realise that in ourselves we are nothing, and that God only is inherently wise and good and strong and everlasting? Does it not prepare a sweeter salvation than if we knew nothing but sunshine? What more odious than to see the pampered child of prosperity pass on from promotion to promotion with an air of satiety and disdain? Tribulation will chasten and purify and beautify and ennoble so that men and angels will acquiesce in the exaltation of a tried and modest faith. God’s plan in this respect is beautiful, in that He is creating beforehand a reason for conferring an honour that we could not earn for ourselves. He has said:

“Them that honour me, I will honour.”

What opportunity could we have of honouring God except by being allowed to live in an evil age, when human honour is the great mainspring of action, and God is everywhere in works denied? If the greeting, *“Well done, good and faithful servant,”* is waiting, it is because, meanwhile, the Master is gone and his service condemned as a worthless and a dishonourable thing. The time will come when we shall look back upon such a time as a time of great opportunity. If we did not have an opportunity, we should be dissatisfied now in proportion as we are earnest lovers of Christ, and we should lack the chief joy that will be ours when we have got through the long conflict with darkness and dishonour and pain and weariness and fasting that is the inevitable lot of saints in the present evil world. Hold on, brethren.

“Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.”

“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

“It shall be said on that day, Lo, this is our God. We have waited for Him. We shall be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”

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