

JUDGMENT AND SALVATION

We do well to have fixed and stated readings of the Scripture at this breaking of bread. It is the best foundation for every assembly of the saints. The best thing we can do at all our meetings is to let our minds rest on the portions that may be read. The best thing any one can do who desires to speak to the edification of the hearers is to employ what has been read as the basis of what he has to say. Let him endeavour to develop, amplify and illustrate this, and he will speak to profit; whereas, if he seek to “make a speech,” in the usual sense of the phrase, he will be in danger of pouring out a weak watery mixture of his own compounding that will give no nutriment. Sermonising is of course quite out of the question. This is only speech-making in the clerical shape—a worse shape than the ordinary shape. Speech-making of all ordinary sorts is a mere process of self-evolution—a spinning of one’s own thoughts, which are weak and colourless and powerless to build the mind in the things of God. We may as well try to make bread without flour as try to speak to edification without the ideas of God so abundantly supplied to us in the word of truth.

We have them in various shapes in the readings this morning. We have a chapter on Moab written in blood—“the burden of Moab”—all calamity and broken hearts:

“In their streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth: on the tops of their houses, and in their streets, everyone shall howl, weeping abundantly . . . The waters of Dimon shall be full of blood” (Isa. 15:3,9).

For what reason was this visitation of judgment to come? Why is it written,

“Moab is spoiled, and gone up out of her cities, and his chosen young men are gone down to the slaughter”?

Why is it written,

“Judgment is come . . . upon all the cities of the land of Moab, far or near”?

The answer is as clear as the description of her calamities:

“This shall they have for their pride” (Zeph. 2:10).

“We have heard of the pride of Moab; he is very proud: even of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath” (Isa. 16:6).

“Make ye him drunken, for he magnified himself against the Lord: Moab also shall wallow in his vomit, and he shall also be in derision. For was not Israel a derision unto thee?”

(Jer. 48:26).

The judgment foretold became in due time the judgment accomplished; and you may now read, in the silent wastes of Moab’s once populous valleys, the truth of Yahweh’s word.

What have we to do with this subject? Just this: the causes that led to judgment on Moab are operative around us in all the world today. Pride and haughtiness and arrogance, and contempt of Israel and all things divine; covetousness, avarice, indifference to right, the treading down of the weak, the disregard of the poor, and the ignoring of the commandments of God prevail in the Christendom of our times as much as ever they did in Moab, and it is an eternal truth that like causes produce like effects. That which brought judgment on Moab will bring judgment on the world at large. It is revealed that it is to be so. The work of Christ at his coming is a work of judgment. So we are informed in the apocalyptic words that speak of him as *“treading the winepress of the wrath of God”*; in the apostolic intimation, that when revealed from heaven it will be *“in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God”*; and in the oft-made prophetic announcement of his arrival as the name of the lord from far, *“burning with his anger . . . his lips full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire.”* Seeing that this is the uncontradictable truth, what ought our position in the world to be? Ought we to be friends and partakers with a generation ripening for the judgment sickle

of the Divine reaper? Ought we to be one and the same with the modern Moabites who despise God, have Israel in derision, and surfeit arrogantly in earth's plenty, as if it were their's? Ought we not to "keep ourselves unspotted from the world"? to "walk *in wisdom* towards them that are without"? as "strangers and pilgrims, to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear"? Knowing that the friendship of the world now will mean the enmity of God in the day when the thunders of the judgment-storm begin to peal throughout the world, when "the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day"?

The reading from the apostolic writings reminds us of the other side of the question. It reminds us that our relation to the day of the Lord, as the brethren of Christ, is not one of fear, but of joy and love and expectation. The idea is expressed in the hymn we sometimes sing, which is itself but the versification of a statement in the prophet Isaiah: -

O, say to the fearful, Be strong of heart;
He comes in vengeance, but not for thee;
For thee he comes, his might to impart
To the trembling heart and the feeble knee.

This comfort is ours if we have made it such. The friendship of Christ is without respect of persons, though with great respect of character. It is remarkable how emphatically and frequently he uses the pronoun "*whosoever*"—absolutely **whosoever**.

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

"Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, the same is my brother and sister and mother."

"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

The coming vengeance is not for us if we are among the "*whosoever*s." This is the point on which we must continually judge ourselves. Do we comply with the qualifications required of the "*whosoever*" class? Obviously we cannot answer this question without acquaintance with the qualifications, and this acquaintance we can only acquire in habitual intimacy with the word. The qualifications are briefly condensed by Jesus into the words,

*"Whosoever shall **do the will** of my Father who is in heaven."*

It is a question of doing what God desires us to do. It is a question of—

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

We cannot learn this by studying science; we cannot learn it by our own reasoning and speculation; we cannot learn it in the works of men. It is to be learnt in the revealed word, and there alone; and when learnt, has to be put into practice with all docility and simplicity and diligence. "*Whosoever*" does this may look with comfort to the day of vengeance. Doubtless the Lord knows who these are, as it is written,

"The Lord knoweth them that are his."

"I know my sheep, and am known of mine:"

But **we** do not know—that is, we do not know in the personal sense. We know that none are His that do not do His will, and that all are His that do; but in discriminating between the one and the other, we may make mistakes. We need not seek particularly to perform this discrimination, except as regards ourselves. As regards others, it is our duty to "*judge not*"; as regards ourselves, it is a matter of command and a matter of common wisdom to "*prove our own selves*." In a sense, like Paul, we cannot judge ourselves:

"He that judgeth us is the Lord:"

But we can stand guard over ourselves; we can subject ourselves to a continual self-scrutiny on the question whether we walk in accordance with the revealed will of the Father. In this sense:

“If we judge ourselves we shall not be judged:”

The Lord will have no censure for those who correct themselves continually by the word. If by this process we bring ourselves into harmony with the Father’s mind, having the answer of a good conscience, we need not distress ourselves on the question that has plagued some—whether we are among the Father’s chosen.

This destination is not decided arbitrarily. It is true the Father’s purpose is the foundation of it, and that those are all foreknown to Him who are to be the subjects of it. It is nevertheless equally true that the mode of realising that purpose is by the gospel preached and proposed for the willing faith and obedience of all who hear it. There can be no clash between the one thing and the other. The Father’s counsels are inscrutable to us, but what He has revealed with regard to them is our property. His revelation in this matter is that He willeth not the death of a sinner, but would rather that he should turn and live; that “every one that thirsteth” is invited, and will be made welcome to the living waters; that “whatsoever will” may come. If, then, we thirst and drink, if we hear and come, we may dismiss the question of whether we are included among those who are foreknown, for the one fact is the form and guarantee of the other. The two things cannot be separated. Our whole anxiety should be directed to our side of the question. Listen to the divine invitation and all is well. Jesus truly says,

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me,” but he adds, *“and him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out”* (John 6:37).

Consequently, the fact of coming to Christ is proof of our inclusion among those given to him. There can be no such thing as a man coming to Christ and being excluded from those given to him in the Father’s plan. The one is an evidence and a means of the other. The whole question of importance for us is in the “*coming*.” Do we “*come*”? If so, all is well, and cannot but be well. We need not trouble about anything else. Nothing, in that case, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Only let us be sure about the “*coming*.” It means much. It means the knowledge of Christ, of course, for this is the first step; but it means much more. A man who knows, but does not love, has not come. A man who knows and loves, but does not obey, deceives himself in thinking he loves. A man who knows, loves, and obeys; that is, who continues in “*all things*” prescribed for disciples to do and continue doing, has come, and will in no wise be cast out. There may be mistakes, shortcomings and offences on the part of such, but these are foreign to the main current of their lives, and there is forgiveness for them. Christ’s priesthood has no other meaning. He is High Priest over his own house. He ever liveth to make intercession for them. He makes requests for brethren whom he loves, and the Father hears him, and is faithful and just to forgive all of whom the appointed High Priest thus makes mention.

“If we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.”

Those who walk in sin have no representative in Christ. Those who are born of God sin not; that is, they are not unrighteous in their habit of mind and action: their failures are exceptions to the habitual run of their lives, and, confessed and repented of, they are forgiven, and they stand at the last before the judgment seat to be proclaimed as constituents of the one body, “*having neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing,*” of whom it is testified in the language of figure, that they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; that is, they are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who shed his blood.

It is our privilege to stand related to this glorious position, if, having obeyed the truth, we walk in it. This is the meaning of our meeting round this table. Even now are we the sons of God—even now are we forgiven—even now do we stand in the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Let us open our minds to this great fact. Christ’s interest is great in all who stand accepted in him. It is no ordinary interest. There is no parallel to it in human experience. We know something of friendship between man and man—in some cases attaining a very ardent development—but here is a friendship of one for many, and that of a strength that never burnt in human bosom before. Paul speaks of it as “*the love of Christ that passeth knowledge.*” For one to love a multitude with a love that shall be personal to each individual in the multitude, and that shall glow with equal ardour for all, is certainly a love passing human knowledge. Such a love is an impossibility in fragile human nature. It requires

the strength of the spirit, compassing all and sustaining its own fire with the inexhaustible fuel of the divine energy. It is the love that exists in Christ and glows for ever towards his brethren. It is the love of God: God is love, and Christ is His glory in manifestation. We see the exquisiteness of the divine wisdom in the finished workmanship of creation around us; we see something of His exhaustless beneficence in the manifest design of all things to confer goodness; but we see these in Christ as they are nowhere else to be seen. They are here brought to a personal focus, and directed towards us in the pledge of unutterable well-being in due time. It is something for us to ponder, to rest on, to be comforted by, to admire. It is a glorious reality—the most glorious reality in creation—made ours in the gospel. It is a great possession now, though by faith only; but what shall it be when we stand before the presence of his glory, to receive its healing effulgence in the company of the mustered friends of God of every age, and in the presence of a countless host of angelic spectators? These things are not “*cunningly-devised fables*,” though so gorgeous. They are the realities of sober truth, though hidden from the eyes of man for a necessary reason. They will burst upon our delighted vision by-and-by. It is only a question of time—and of a short time at the longest. The announcement of the Lord’s arrival may any day hurry us into their presence, or the fall of death’s curtain on our path may at any time, as with the wave of a magician’s wand, conjure us away in a moment from the horrors of this evil state, and show us the manifold glories of the divine purpose in the presence of Christ returned. In this sense, living or dying, our position is a position of constantly imminent hope. Living or dying, we are the Lord’s; and to be His, we are related to the glories of the great salvation which transcend the wildest dreams of the most imaginative of poets, and beggar all human speech to convey an adequate idea of them. They are well named by Paul “*the unsearchable riches of Christ*.” It is only a sober fact that it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive of them. God hath revealed them by His spirit; but, for all that, the vision of them in great measure lies latent in the words that convey them, and remains invisible to millions who have the words but discern them not.

To the common run, “*the love of Christ*” is but a phrase—a theological phrase—a collocation of words that jingles drily in the ear, and suggests nothing more interesting than pews and pulpits and weary hours. To the ear of enlightened intelligence, it is a joyful sound, to know which makes a people palpably blessed. It represents the most precious fact in the universe. What is a man without the love of Christ—if Christ regard him not? Only a superior animal dragging out a sluggish existence which, by and by, must end in darkness under the grave-digger’s spade. The love of Christ is a necessity even now, as that “*uplifting ideal*” which Professor Tyndall acknowledges man requires, but which he cannot find in nature. A man may think he can do without it: so he can, as the famine-stricken peasantry of Egypt can do without food. He can do without it and famish; he can do without it and die. He can get through life as it now is, consumed and deteriorated by the reigning vanity, and eligible for a properly certificated burial in some picturesque cemetery, in which the birds will twitter and the flowers will bow, in total indifference to his finished life and to his sepulchred remains. A man of true reason cannot thus be content with “*vanity and vexation of spirit*.” If there were nothing else, he would try to reconcile himself to his wretchedness. But with God’s written invitation on the glowing page of Scripture he cannot, he will not, he dare not, hold the love of Christ cheaply. Despised love will turn to appalling hatred in the day of “*the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*.”

The love of Christ is even now an ennobling blessing; but how shall it be estimated when it becomes visible to all men as the effectual means of physical renovation, the gateway to riches, honour, power, gladness, strength, and immortality? Every one will place the right value on it then, if they never did before. But many will awake to a realisation of it when it is too late.

“*Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation*.”

It is while these things are yet all a matter of faith that God is pleased to enable us to acquire a right to their possession in the day of the manifested tree of life. This is why we are assembled this morning. God has asked at our hand “*a patient continuance in well-doing*.” He has enlightened us as to the nature of what He considers well-doing. He commands us to “*be not weary in well-doing*;” and we advantage ourselves and do honour to Him in this weekly assembly to listen to His voice. We require to be continually strengthened in our endeavours. The way is hard, and, as in the journeyings of Israel in the wilderness, “*the soul of the people*” is liable to be “*discouraged because of the way*.” How can

we hold up against it but by recollection of the promises and by prayer to the God of Israel—the God who covenanted the promises—the God who made us and who knows all our difficulties and infirmities; that He would strengthen our heart in the endurance of the darkness that covers all the earth, and in the performance of the difficult part which He has asked at our hands!

It is helpful to recollect the fact referred to by Paul, when he says,

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man” (1 Cor. 10:13).

At the worst, we are only fellow-sufferers with the common stock of which we form a part. As the brethren of Christ looking for his appearing, and striving to qualify ourselves for that event by the self-denial of all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we are not worse off than those whose portion is in this life, and to whom the great and precious promises of God are as the mere froth of fanaticism. Nay, we are much better off than they even now. It is in many senses true that—

“Godliness hath profit both for the life that now is and for that which is to come.”

There is no true happiness in the world. With all the fuss and the show of importance, with all the colour and apparent zest of pleasure-following, with all the display and the honouring of one another, there is a gnawing worm at the heart. Only the young are delighted, and they but for a short time. A cloud settles on all mortal things for the blithest and the most spirited. It must be so. Though disfigured, we are in the image of the *elohim* as a race. We are mentally constituted for friendship with God. It is impossible we can have peace and joy in alienation from Him. *“Vanity and vexation of spirit”* must come of all attempts to employ existence without Him. The world is not happy: it cannot be. It is of the Lord that the people weary themselves in the fires of vanity. But in the truth, we are reconciled to God, and if we are living in a state of reconciliation (that is, doing those things in which He has declared His pleasure), then we are living in a state of peace. There may be—there is—much deprivation to be endured—many crosses to be carried—many present advantages to be sacrificed as the result of trying to live the lives of saints in the present evil world; but, with all the drawbacks, we are happier in our activity, have more interest in existence, and can indulge in a more effective manner in the pleasure of anticipation, than those who know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has all the chafe and fretfulness of an evil state without any of the alleviations that come with the gospel. Therefore, let us rightly estimate our position. Let us realise that even now we are greatly favoured in knowing God, or rather in being known of Him, while as regards the measureless futurity of the ages that are to come, it is difficult to express, and impossible to exaggerate, the glory of our standing as *“fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God.”*

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