

## **CULTURE VALUELESS—GOD SUPPLIES EVERYTHING**

We have assembled here this morning for two reasons—first, because we like to come, and second, because we have been commanded to come. If we ask why we like to come, and why we have been commanded to come, we open out a very wide field of contemplation, in which it may be profitable for a short time to roam. The answer centres our thoughts directly on Christ, and from this centre, we find them radiate to the entire circumference of human interest and human life. There is nothing interesting to human culture or important in human life but what has its full effectuation in him and him alone.

Men of mind are concerned about three things: character, human condition, as involved in politics and economics, and the question of a future life. In all three, Christ is the only solution. Character results from the regulation of the various impulses and capacities of which we are naturally composed. Man has no system of thought equal to the regulation of these. Philosophy, so called, is powerless to supply the needful motive and control. It produces a certain kind of culture; but it lacks the warmth and fulness and beauty of the mental and moral results that spring from the faith of Christ. Consider these results as defined by Paul when he speaks of—

*“The fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”*

Take these separately: *“love.”* Human culture does not bring this with it. It may teach it, but it cannot induce it. A refined selfishness results from all its experiences and maxims, whether you take them as exemplified in the philosophy of Greece and Rome, or the cynical agnosticism of British caste. But with Christ it is a matter of command and living constraining example. In him we have eternal wisdom concrete in a lovely personality, who comes near to us and says,

*“I have loved you. This I command you, that ye love one another.”*

The love he enjoins goes further even than this:

*“I say unto you, Love ye your enemies: do good to them that hate you.”*

It might seem at first sight as if love could not be induced thus by command; but the fact is different from the appearance. With Christ clearly in mental view, we can do and feel what he commands us, if for no other reason than that he commands. The result is seen and felt in a general and cordial beneficence that springs up within the character—a beneficence of a warmer and more enduring type than is possible with the mere man of nature—a kindness and a sympathy that depend not on advantage, and are not partial, and that can outlive insult and injury.

Then *“joy.”* What is there in secular culture to compare with the faith of Christ in its power to produce the pure exultation we mean by this? Joy results from the action of the superior faculties—veneration, benevolence, faith, hope, conscientiousness, acting with the collateral vibrations of gratified approbateness, acquisitiveness, and all the other faculties which are good in their right relation, though so evil as ruling powers. Human wisdom, shutting out God and His promises is cut off from the power and possibility of bringing these higher powers into full action. Veneration has no adequate leverage without God presented for worship; faith has no object apart from revelation believed; hope has nothing to stir it if confined to anticipations limited by mortal life and frailty. In Christ, all these powers have their fullest scope; and the result is joy—a joy not only not dependent upon favourable human conditions, but that can act in the face of the worst conditions, because of the confidence of God working in all things and using the most calamitous circumstances sometimes to further His highest ends with us. Thus it is that Paul says:

*“We glory in tribulation also.”*

James exhorts the brethren to—

*“Count it all joy when they fall into divers trials, knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience.”*

Human wisdom can show nothing like this. It has no cause to be joyful in tribulation, and, as a fact, is extremely the reverse.

Then there is *“peace.”* This, Jesus plainly says, *“the world cannot give.”* But this he gives:

*“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.”*

The conditions of peace are wanting from the wisdom of this world. Peace is the absence of anxiety and the presence of that serenity that comes with the assurance of good, and from the conviction of being in harmony with the right and the true (which can only be ascertained by revelation from God). The world is away from peace on all these heads. It trusts in itself without the power to control the issues of things. It has no guarantee of good or ground of faith in the future, and it concerns itself very little with the question of righteousness. It has truly no standard of righteousness, for the will of God, which it ignores, is the only standard of righteousness. How complete is our position in Christ on all these points:

*“Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God: believe also in me.”*

This double belief is a great bulwark of peace. God has sent Christ to offer friendship in the forgiveness of our sins now, with perfect blessedness in prospect. As Paul so richly expresses it in his epistle to the Ephesians:

*“God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace are ye saved—it is no affair of human contrivance or human claim), and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.”*

When we look away from this towards human wisdom, it is all dark and cold.

And so with the other items that go to make up *“the fruits of the Spirit.”* As features of character they are beautiful. Contrasted with *“the works of the flesh,”* they are as the beauty of an angel to the hideousness of the gorilla. They have this manifest beauty to the eyes of all; for even the children of wickedness can admire the beauty of holiness. But though man can admire them, he cannot produce them. It requires a class of truth and a force of motive that can only be found in connection with Christ.

Turning from moral culture, what, in natural order, is the next subject of solicitude with superior minds? The state of man as affected by social and political arrangements. The world is ringing with agitation on this subject in various shapes and forms. Here are millions of poverty-struck human beings, with indefinite capacity for multiplication, and not power to lift themselves out of the brutalised state in which incessant labour has sunk them. Even if they could improve their lot a little, what lies before us in a limited earth and a population with boundless possibilities of increase? A hell of confusion at last. The higher minds begin to see it and to despair. The other day, Professor Huxley lamented the slender grounds for hope, and said something to the effect that if the present state of things was to continue, the best thing that could happen would be for some kindly comet to come and sweep the whole arrangement off the face of the planet.

Turn from this to the prospect we have in Christ. Carlyle said that what was wanted was that one strong man should make his advent, and lay hold with strong arm on universal affairs and compel man to submit to what was good for them. This is precisely what the purpose of God provides, as proclaimed in the Gospel of the Kingdom.

*“God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).*

*“Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword that with it he should smite the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron” (Rev. 19:15).*

With such a prospect, the believer in Christ can survey with calmness the political deadlock into which the world is drifting. He can afford to wait, for he waits for God, and it is naturally true that *“they shall not be ashamed that wait for Him.”* God, who made the earth, has made no mistake in the working out of its affairs. He purposes a regulation and administration of human life upon the earth that will realise the highest possibilities of existence. It will be an administration through a king. The foundation is laid in Christ as a head centre, through whom the Creator’s own headship will be enforced. A preparation has been made in the most interesting way imaginable. First, in Christ, the root mischief that has put things wrong upon earth is rectified. Matters have gone wrong between God and man. The first principle of submission—absolute submission—on the part of man to what God commands has been violated. Death has reigned by sin, and mortal man has vainly turmoiled for generations in the awful confusion resulting. In the coming King, as nucleus of a new development,

this has been put right. Possessing the very nature we inherit from Eden, sin has been condemned, and the supremacy of God enforced in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and in the proclamation of his name to mankind as the only acceptable way of approach to God.

Then sinful mankind have been left to manage their own affairs, with the double result of subduing the earth and getting it into order for the new race, and, at the same time, of convincing themselves of their utter inability to rule themselves. At the ripe moment, the new king stands forth, in a second appearing, "*in power and great glory*," to "*break in pieces*" the governments of sinful mankind, and to take unto himself his own great God-given power, setting up a Kingdom in which his friends will shine, the glory of God prevail, and that will rule over all the world for the blessedness of all the families of the earth, as promised in the beginning. Here is a perfect provision for the political needs of the world, and a perfect solution of the problems that present themselves to the thoughtful student of the human state. In what other direction is there hope? None, absolutely none. Those who think otherwise—those who entertain roseate views of human prospects in the natural order are not the thinkers and statesmen of the world, but men of limited horizon and conventional view—men of contented personal circumstances, who have not embraced all the elements of the problem, and who find gratification for their personal ambitions in the little spheres of public life. All men of mental breadth and full information recognise the darkness of the prospect for which the gospel alone provides the needed light and relief.

What next concerns superior minds after the questions of moral culture and human condition? Is it not the problem of what is known as the future state? Is there another life? Or is human life but a transient bubble on the ocean, shining in the sunlight with prismatic beauty for a moment, and then collapsing for ever? Does death wipe out all personal relations to futurity, or is there a sequel in another state to the toils and hopes of individual mortal experience? And if there is, what principles affect its issues and determine our relations to it? Many are the speculations in which mere human thought indulge on this most interesting theme. Where shall we look for light? Where shall we find knowledge? It is more and more being felt and recognised that as a problem of nature, this question is in utter darkness. Agnosticism is the growing temper of the age. "We do not know" is the frank admission of superior candour. Another class go further and say, "We cannot know." This is a different attitude. It is an indefensible attitude. Ignorance is one thing; but to glorify ignorance by parading it as the superior and only accessible knowledge is going quite unwarrantably far. What is knowledge? It is acquaintance with what is. The truthfulness of this simple definition will be apparent when we contrast a man's mental state when he first appears in the world and when he is thirty years of age. There is a great difference between the two states. When he is a baby in his cradle, he knows nothing—absolutely nothing. His brain is a blank on the commonest things. Slowly he takes in knowledge. How? By eye and ear and sensation. First he becomes acquainted with the light, then with the face of his nurse, then with the form of other objects. Slowly his impressions form as he grows. He makes the acquaintance of the walls of the room where he is, then he learns to look out of the window and to know that there is a street outside, then that there are other houses and streets; by and by, that there is a country beyond the town where he is; then, that there are other towns; by and by, that there are other countries, and then slowly in detail, that there have been men before him; that kings have reigned, and battles been fought, and history been enacted before he was born. Many other things he gets to know, but all on one principle—the principle of becoming acquainted with what is. Does the agnostic say that we cannot become acquainted with what is? He would convict himself of being a fool were he to take this position. What is it then that he is so agnostic about—so unknowing about? —for this is all the high-sounding epithet means. As to future life, why should he be unknowing? Has there been no revelation? Has Christ not risen? Here he may say, "I do not know;" but this is mere ignorance. Let the evidence be considered, and there is but one answer. A man might take the position of saying, "I cannot be sure there was such a man as Charlemagne, as Alexander, as Cyrus, as Nebuchadnezzar;" but such a position would only earn for him the contempt of common sense in all the world. Such is the sentiment with which a man is entitled to be regarded who says "I do not know if there was such a man as Jesus Christ. I do not know if he rose from the dead." He might be honest enough to say it, but it is the honesty of mental incompetence, fog, or ignorance. The evidence exists, and it cannot be confuted. It cannot be touched. It cannot begin to be doubted or impugned in the application of true logic. Christ stands before the world as the solution of this engrossing problem of a future life. He proclaimed himself the Light of the world.

*“He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”*

*“He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”*

*“This is the Father’s will who hath sent me, that of all that He hath given me I should lose nothing, but raise it up again at the last day.”*

*“I am come that they might have life.”*

*“I am the living bread that came down from heaven, whereof if a man eat he shall not die, but have everlasting life.”*

The validity of these claims Jesus proved in the performance of works to which he appealed as his witness, and by the crowning marvel of his own resurrection. Men may be ignorant or unbelieving of these things; but the things themselves stand in their own invincible truth and power. We are happy in being united this morning in such a glorious faith. Unworthy of it shall we be if we hold it loosely or lukewarmly. Men are admired for enthusiasm and enterprise in behalf of various movements of human origination and scope—politics, philanthropy, temperance, reform and what not. Why are we not to be allowed some enthusiasm for him *“in whom are filled up all treasures of wisdom and knowledge?”* for whom Paul said,

*“I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in him.”*

The question has but one reasonable answer. It is only the dim eye, the stolid heart, and preoccupied mind of ignorance that are impervious to the glory of Christ. When *“the eyes of our understanding are enlightened, and we know what is the hope of His calling and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe,”* intelligence only finds suitable relief in a fervid *“Amen!”* to the exhortation of Paul when he says,

*“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving . . . and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ.”*

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By Bro. Robert Roberts