

John - Commentaries by Hamilton Smith

The Lord Is My Shepherd and Other Papers, When They Had Dined

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Following upon the scene at the lake side, the disciples find when they come to land, a fire of coals, fish laid thereon and bread, and an invitation to come and dine. Rich provision had been made for their needs, apart from all their efforts.

When they had dined we have the closing scene in which again Peter and John have a special place, and for the fifth time John is described as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (vs. 20). First we have the Lord's tender dealings with the man that trusted in his own love. Peter, who had said he was ready to go with the Lord to prison and death, had found that he was not ready to stand before the simple question of a serving maid. But of the actual denial, no word is said in this touching scene. The solemn breakdown had been dealt with between the Lord and His servant in an interview with which no stranger shall intermeddle. All we know of that interview is the statement of the Eleven, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon," confirmed long after by the Apostle Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians that the risen Christ "was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve." Wonderful love that with tender mercy gave the first interview to the most failing disciple.

If, however, in the first interview his conscience was relieved, in this scene his heart is restored. There the Lord had dealt with the outward failure, here He deals with the inward root that caused the failure. The root was confidence in his love to Christ, and the three-fold question thoroughly exposes this root. It is as if the Lord said, "After all that has happened, do you still maintain, Peter, that you love Me more than these?" With the second question, the Lord says nothing of the other disciples: it is simply now, "Lovest thou Me?" With the third question, the Lord, using a different word, asks, "Art thou attached to Me" (JND)? By his third answer Peter puts himself entirely into the Lord's hands, saying, "Lord, thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I am attached to Thee" (JND). It is as if Peter said, "I cannot trust my love, or talk of my love, or what I will do, but Lord, You know all things, and You know my heart, I will leave You to estimate my love, and tell me what to do."

No longer is Peter telling the Lord in self-confidence what he is ready to do, but it is the Lord, in infinite grace, telling His restored disciple what He will enable him to do. The Lord, as it were, says, "You no longer trust in your love to do great things for Me, you have left it to Me; then go forth and

"Feed My sheep" (verse 17),

"Glorify God" (verse 19), and

"Follow Me" (verse 19).

The Lord seems to say, "Time was when you thought you loved Me more than these other disciples; now go forth and show your love by feeding My sheep that I love. You thought to glorify yourself above others by prison and death, now go forth to prison and death to glorify God, and when all is over down here, still follow Me far into the depths of glory where I am going." May we not say that not the least wonderful of all the wonders of the Lord's life, is the way He takes with a failing disciple?

But what of John? "Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following." The man who trusted in his own love and had broken down, needed restoring grace, and the exhortation, "Follow Me." Not so the man who was resting in the love of the Lord, for he was "following."

Thus, in the disciple whom Jesus loved, we see set forth the blessed results that follow for those who rest in the love of the Lord; such

Dwell in nearness to, and intimacy with, the Lord;

Are ready to be used in the service of the Lord;

Will make spiritual progress;

Will have spiritual discernment; and

Will follow close to the Lord.

May it be our happy portion, like the bride of the Song, to say, "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me." If we can say little of our love to Him, we can safely boast of His love to us. It is the privilege of the youngest believer to say, "I am a disciple that Jesus loves," and the oldest and most advanced disciple can say nothing greater, for all blessing is found in His all-embracing love, that led Him to die for us that we too might go forth, in our small way, and feed His sheep, glorify God, and follow Him into the glory where He is gone.

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The Lord Is My Shepherd and Other Papers, Sea of Tiberias, The

In this instructive scene Peter and John again have a prominent place, and for the fourth time John is referred to as the disciple whom Jesus loved (vs. 7). As usual the energetic and impulsive Peter takes the lead. He goes back to his old occupation. He does not ask others to do so, but simply says, "I go a fishing." However, under the influence of his dominating personality, "They say unto him, We also go with thee." They went forth, therefore, and toiled all night, and for their pains caught nothing.

When the morning came, "Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus." Having by a question shown them the uselessness of efforts put forth without His direction, He proceeds to show how rich the results when acting under His control. Immediately the disciple whom Jesus loved perceives, "It is the Lord." The one who is trusting in the Lord's love is the one who has quick spiritual perception.

Christian Truth: Volume 35, Sea of Tiberias, The

"I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." Luke 12:19, 20.

"O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Matt. 15:28.

The above two scriptures seem almost like a New Testament commentary upon the Old Testament story of Nabal and Abigail (1 Sam. 25). David was at this time, though God's anointed king, a homeless wanderer and fugitive from the hands of Saul, accompanied only by a small band of faithful followers who owned his claims.

What an illustration this is of the present position of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's King, rejected and cast out by the world. "The kings of the earth stood up," we read in Acts 4, "and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ." "We will not have this man to reign over us," was the world's verdict, and the last it saw of Him, He was hanging upon a cross between two thieves. When next it sees Him, He will be coming in "power and great glory," in righteousness to "judge and make war.... And... on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords" (Rev. 19).

Well, here we find David needing provisions and, being in the neighborhood of this wealthy man of the world whose shepherds he had protected amid the rocky solitudes of Carmel, he sends to ask for supplies for the young men, with the quiet dignity of conscious power. "Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. And thus ye shall say to him,... Peace."

What a lovely word! How well calculated to touch the heart of even the most thorough worldling! It is just one thing that the world cannot supply, or money purchase. "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" The world speaks of joy, mirth, pleasure, but never mentions peace, for it knows it not. "There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked." Isa. 48:22.

"Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not?" said Nabal; and when David heard the reply, he said, "Gird ye on every man his sword." If he will not have peace, judgment must fall. Alas! for Nabal. The offer of peace rejected, he fell under the judgment of God. The sweet message of mercy scoffed at and ignored, he sat down to eat and drink while death was hovering over his threshold. "And it came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died."

"So David's young men... came and told him all those sayings." There is a sweet thought here for all the Lord's servants. When the Word has been preached and the people have dispersed, then it is your privilege to return and tell Him about it. "Send me away," said Eliezer, "unto my master" (Gen. 24:54). Flushed with the success of his mission, one less devoted might have been inclined to linger in the happy surroundings where he had been so blessed. But his heart was with his master, and all the joy and success was incomplete till shared with him. So too, the apostles whom the Lord had sent forth, "when they were returned, told Him all that they had done" (Luke 9:10).

But it is a relief now to turn to Abigail and follow the footsteps of this woman of faith. Doubtless the fame of David had reached her ears. She had heard of his gracious acts, his mighty power. She believed him to be God's anointed, though at the moment a fugitive from the hands of Saul. Her servants told her how the message of peace had come to her household, and of its rejection; and, like one of an earlier day, "moved with fear," she determined to go to meet him, and seek the salvation of herself and of her people. Happy decision!

Abigail made haste. Three times we read that she made haste. She must make peace with David without delay. All other concerns must be thrown aside till this momentous matter had been settled, and her salvation secured. "Abigail made haste," and taking her true place before David in utter self-abasement at his feet, she owned her sins, sought his forgiveness, and acknowledged him as lord.

How sweetly must those words have sounded in the ears of the hunted fugitive-"My lord"- though they came from a feeble woman's lips. How cheering the confident confession, "My lord fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days... But when the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid." Like the dying thief, she looked on to a day of glory and, like him, she received a ready reply to her petition-"Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person."

What a marvelous picture of Christ's way of receiving sinners! And how sweet it is to His heart now, to be sought and owned by poor lost ones like you and me in this day of His rejection. Listen to His own words as He describes it when the poor outcast of John 4 owns Him in her heart as "the Christ"; "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," and in Luke 15, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost."

And listen to what David says to Abigail: "Blessed be thou." Why? What was she blessed for? Because she took her true place as a needy suppliant, and owned him as her Savior. Because her faith recognized him as God's anointed and, cost what it might, she determined to throw in her lot with him. So he calls her blessed.

Well, David never forgot Abigail's faith. But he was not content that she should remain at a distance from him; so, after the death of Nabal, he sent for her to be his wife. And will anything short of union satisfy the heart of Christ for His blood bought ones? No; "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4).

As Abigail shared the fortunes of David, as she roamed with him from one hiding place to another-sharing his poverty and hardship-some might have said, What folly to give up a luxurious home and the broad acres and great possessions of her husband Nabal, for a life of trial and privation. But a day of reversal was coming, a day for which she was content to wait, when David, with the kingdom restored to him, would be reigning at Jerusalem, and she reigning with him. And how richly did that time compensate for all the sorrows of the past!

The Lord Is My Shepherd and Other Papers, Resurrection, The

For the third time, John is presented as the disciple whom Jesus loved on the resurrection morning, and again is found in association with Peter. The two disciples, learning from the women that the sepulcher is empty, hasten to the tomb. Then follows the record of what might appear to be an insignificant detail, namely that Peter starts first, that both disciples run together, and finally that the disciple whom Jesus loved did outrun Peter. Nothing that the Spirit of God has recorded can be unimportant, though, as in this case, it may be difficult to seize the import of a particular incident. Yet, if we may be allowed to spiritualize this scene, we may learn, what is surely true, that while the man of ardent nature may often take the lead in some spiritual enterprise, it is the man who is leaning on the love of the Lord that finally leads the way.

Christian Truth: Volume 35, Resurrection, The

John 20:1-4

For the third time John is presented as the disciple whom Jesus loved, again in association with Peter, this time on the resurrection morning. The two disciples, learning from the women that the sepulcher is empty, hasten to the tomb. Then follows the record of what might appear to be insignificant details: Peter starts first to the tomb, both disciples run together, and finally, the disciple whom Jesus loved did outrun Peter. However, nothing that the Spirit of God has recorded can be unimportant, although, as in this case, it may be difficult to seize the import of a particular incident. Yet, if we may be allowed to spiritualize this scene, we may learn what is surely true: that while the man of ardent nature may often take the lead at the beginning of some spiritual enterprise, it is the man who is leaning on the love of the Lord that finally leads the way.

The Lord Is My Shepherd and Other Papers, Cross, The

The second occasion on which John is described as the disciple whom Jesus loved, brings us to the cross. The mother of Jesus is present with other devoted women, and one disciple is there the - disciple whom Jesus loved. Where is now the disciple that rested in his love to Christ? Alas, away in some lonely spot with a broken heart, weeping tears of bitter shame. Where is the disciple who rests in the love of Christ? As in the Upper Room, so now at the cross, as near to Christ as he can be. And what is the result? He becomes a vessel fit and meet for the Master's use. The mother of Jesus is committed to his care. Resting in the Lord's love fits for service.

Christian Truth: Volume 35, Cross, The

"The manifold wisdom of God." God has shown His wisdom in creation, in providence, and in His government of His earthly people. Now we find a totally new thing in the wisdom of God, namely, that there are those who are united to His Son in glory, the whole question of sin having been so entirely settled that God can now bring us into the very same glory which Christ has taken as man. This is something entirely new that is brought out here in Ephesians, concerning which there was perfect silence in the Old Testament scriptures.

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 17:22-26: The Saints Glorified With Christ

John 17:22-26

THE Lord, in the opening portion of the prayer, has prayed for the glory of the Father. In the second portion He thinks of His own, and prays that, during the time of His absence, they may be kept for His glory—that He may be glorified in the saints. In this closing portion of the prayer the Lord passes in thought to the coming glory, and prays that His own may be glorified with Him.

(V. 22). With this great end in view the Lord can say, "The glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them." The glory that is given to Christ as Man, He secures for, and shares with, His own. This glory He has given to His own that they may be one. So perfect is this unity that nothing less than the unity between the Father and the Son can serve for its pattern, as the Lord can say, "That they may be one, even as We are one."

(V. 23). The words that follow tell us how the saints will be "perfected into one" (N. Tr.), as well as the great end for which they are made one. The Lord indicates how the unity is brought about when He says, "I in them, and Thou in Me." This takes us on to the glory when Christ will be perfectly set forth in the saints, even as the Father is perfectly set forth in the Son. What is it that has marred the unity, and scattered and divided the saints of God on earth? Is it not the allowance in our lives of so much that is not of Christ? Yet, even so, if all the saints on earth, at any given moment, had expressed only Christ, it would hardly have displayed the unity of which the Lord speaks in these closing verses. It will require nothing less than the whole company of the saints in glory to adequately set forth the fullness of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23). Then indeed Christ—and nothing but Christ—will be seen in His people. We shall "all come in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). The saints so long scattered and divided on earth will be "perfected into one" in glory. "With the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye" (Isa. 52:8).

The great end of this perfect unity is the manifestation before the world of the glory of Christ as the sent One of the Father, and the love of the Father for the disciples. When the world sees Christ displayed in glory, in His people, they will know that the One they despised and hated, was indeed the sent One of the Father, and they will realize that the saints of Christ, that they cast out and persecuted, are loved by the Father with the same love that the Father has to Christ.

(V. 24). There is, moreover, a glory far beyond the glory that will be manifested to the world, and, beyond the millennial blessing of the earth, there is an inner circle of heavenly blessing. In this inner place of blessing the saints will have their part, for the Lord can say, "Father I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me, where I am." Very early in the discourses the Lord had revealed the great desire of His heart to receive us unto Himself, that where He is we may be also. Now, once again, as the prayer draws to its close, we are reminded of this desire of His heart, as we hear the Lord saying, "I will that they ... be with Me where I am."

While, however, it will be our high privilege to be with Him where He is, there will ever be a personal glory, belonging to Christ, which we shall behold, but, which none can share. Christ as the Son will forever have His unique place with the Father. There is a glory that is special to Christ; there is a love that is special to Christ—the love which He enjoyed before the foundation of the world; and there is a knowledge that is special, for the Lord can say, "O Father the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee."

The saints will know that the One to whom this special glory belongs—this special love, this special knowledge—is the One who has been sent by the Father to make the Father known. Thus they are distinguished from the world that fails to discern that the Son was the sent One of the Father.

(V. 26). To His own the Lord declares the Father's name, and the declaration of the Father's name reveals the Father's love, that the consciousness of the Father's love, ever known and enjoyed by the Lord is His pathway, may be known and enjoyed by His disciples. Moreover if this love is in them, Christ—the One that the Father loves—will have a place in their affections. He will be in them. Thus as we listen to the last utterance, we are left with the great desire of His heart filling our thoughts, that Christ may be in His people— "I in them."

Very surely this desire of His heart will be fulfilled in the coming glory; but, may we not say, that the great thought of the last discourses, as well as the last prayer, is that Christ should be livingly seen in His people even now? To this end our feet are washed, our hearts are comforted, our lives made fruitful, and our minds instructed. For this end the Lord permits us to listen to His last prayer that closes with the words, "I IN THEM."

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 17:6-21: Christ Glorified in the Saints

John 17:6-21

THE first and pre-eminent desire of the heart of Christ is to secure the glory of the Father. This is the great object in the first portion of the prayer. The second desire of the heart of Christ is that He, Himself, may be glorified in His saints, as He can say, "I am glorified in them" (10). This desire, apparently, underlies the requests in this fresh portion of the prayer.

The Lord in His path on earth had glorified the Father in heaven. Now, as He takes His place in heaven, He desires that His disciples should glorify Him in their path on earth. In order to give effect to this desire, He very blessedly sets the feet of His disciples in the path that His feet had trodden, before the Father.

(Vv. 6-8). In the opening verses of this part of the prayer the Lord designates those for whom He prays, and presents the characteristics that endear them to Himself and call forth His prayer on their behalf.

First, they are a company of people who have been drawn out of the world, and given to Christ by the Father, and hence loved by Christ as a gift from the Father.

Second, they are a company to whom the Lord had manifested the Father's name. In Scripture a name sets forth all that a person is. When Moses is sent by Jehovah to Israel, he says they will ask, "What is His name?" This amounts to saying, "If I tell them your name they will know who you are." So the manifestation of the Father's name is the declaration of all that the Father is.

Third, not only had the Lord declared the Father, but He had given to His disciples the "words" which the Father had given Him. He shared with them the communications that He had received from the Father, so that they not only learn who the Father is in all His love and holiness,

but, through the “words,” they learn the Father’s mind. If the “word” reveals who He is, the “words” reveal His mind and thoughts.

Further they are a company who by grace had responded to these revelations, and thus the Lord can say of them, “They have kept Thy word:” “They have known that all things whatsoever Thou hast given Me are of Thee:” “They have received” the words: they “have known surely that I came out from Thee;” and lastly “they have believed that Thou didst send Me.”

(V. 9-11). Having thus designated those for whom He prays, the Lord very blessedly intimates why He prays for them. Ever thinking of the Father, the Lord states “they are Thine” as His first reason for praying for them. Already the Lord has said, “Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me,” but He can still say “they are Thine.” They did not cease to be the Father’s, because the Father gave them to the Son, for the Lord adds, “All mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine.” Rich with meaning is this double statement, for, as Luther has been reported to have said, Any one might justly say to God ‘All that is mine is Thine,’ but no created being could go on to say, ‘And all that is Thine is mine.’ This is a word for Christ alone.

Then, as a second great reason for praying for His disciples, the Lord adds, “I am glorified in them.” We are left in this world to represent the One who has gone to glory, and the measure in which Christ is seen in His people, is the measure in which He is glorified before the world.

Moreover, there is yet another reason that calls forth the Lord’s prayer. Christ is no more in the world to protect His own by His actual presence with them. He is going to the Father, while His own are left behind in the midst of an evil and Christ-hating world. How great then will be their need of the Lord’s prayer on their behalf.

(V. 11). In the latter half of verse eleven we pass from hearing the reasons for the Lord’s prayer, to listening to the definite requests that the Lord makes to the Father. These petitions are fourfold. First, that His disciples may be kept in holiness; second, that they may be one; third, that they may be kept from evil; lastly, that they may be sanctified. At once we can appreciate how necessary are these requests, for if Christ is to be glorified in His own how needful that they should be holy in nature, united in heart, separate from evil, and sanctified to the Lord’s use.

The first request is that the disciples may be kept in accord with the name of the Holy Father. This involves our maintenance in the holiness that His nature demands. Peter, in his epistle, may have had this request in his mind, when he exhorted those who call on the Father to be holy in all manner of conversation.

The Lord’s second desire is expressed in the words, “that they may be one as We.” It is important to remember that holiness comes before unity, for there is the danger of seeking unity at the expense of holiness. This is the first of the three “unities” to which the Lord refers in the course of the prayer. It is primarily the unity of the Apostles. The Lord desires that they may be “one as We.” This is a unity of aim, thought, and purpose, such as existed between the Father and the Son.

(Vv. 12-14). Between the second and third requests we are permitted to hear the Lord presenting to the Father the reasons for His intercession. While in the world He had kept His disciples in the Father’s name, and guarded them from all the power of the enemy. Now that the Lord was going to the Father, He permits us to hear His words so that we may know His guardianship does not cease, though its method is changed. Before He goes to the Father He would have us know that we are put into the Father’s loving care. This would lead to Christ’s joy being fulfilled in the disciples. Even as the Lord had walked in the unclouded enjoyment of the Father’s love, so He would have us to walk in the joy of knowing we are under the care of the Father, who loves us with the eternal and unchanging love wherewith He loves the Son.

Moreover the Lord has given His disciples the Father’s word. The “word” of the Father is the revelation of the eternal counsels of the Father. Entering into these counsels we drink of the river of His pleasure—a river that widens as it flows, bearing us along through millennial ages into the ocean of eternity. Thus, even as the Son, the disciples would not only have the joy of knowing they were under the guardian love of the Father, but they would also know the blessing that love had purposed for them.

Furthermore, if they enjoyed the Son’s portion before the Father they would also share His portion in relation to the world. The world hated Christ because He was not of it. There was nothing in common between Christ and the world. He was but a Stranger here, moved by motives and governed by objects entirely foreign to this world. If He was misunderstood and hated, we also, if following in His path, will be hated by the world.

Thus most blessedly the disciples are set before the Father in the same position that the Son had occupied before the Father as a Man on earth. The Father’s name is revealed to them; the Father’s word is given to them; the Father’s care is assured to them; Christ’s joy is their joy; Christ’s reproach and Christ’s strangership is their portion in this world.

(Vv. 15, 16). Now the Lord resumes His requests. The first two requests were connected with things in which the Lord desires His disciples to be kept—holiness and unity. The last two requests are more in connection with things from which He desires they may be preserved. Thus it is the Lord prays that the disciples may be kept from the evil of the world. He does not pray that they may be taken out of it—the time for this had not come—for He had work for them to do in the world. The world, however, being evil, is an ever present danger to His own, hence He prays “Keep them from the evil.”

(V. 17). Separation from actual evil is not enough, therefore the Lord also prays for our sanctification. The distinctive truth in sanctification is not simply separation from evil, but rather devotedness and suitability to God. The sanctification for which the Lord prays is not the absolute sanctification which is secured by His death, brought before us in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we read “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” In the prayer it is the practical sanctification by which we are divested of all that is unsuitable to God in our thoughts, habits, and practical ways, in order that we may be “sanctified and meet for the Master’s use” (2 Tim. 2:21).

We gather from the Lord’s words that there are two ways in which this practical sanctification is effected. First by the truth. The Lord speaks of the truth as being “Thy Word,” that is the Father’s Word. All Scripture, indeed, is the Word of God, but the Father’s Word has probably

more in view the New Testament, revealing the Father's name, the Father's mind, and the Father's counsel. Every declaration of the name of God calls for a corresponding separation from the world and sanctification to God. To Abraham, God declared, "I am the Almighty God," and immediately adds, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1). To Israel God revealed Himself as Jehovah, and God looked that Israel's ways should correspond to this name. They were to "fear this glorious and fearful name" (Deut. 28:58). How much more should there be a sanctification that corresponds to the full revelation of God as the Father.

(V. 18). This separation from evil, and sanctification to God is in view of the disciples' service—that they may be morally fit to carry out their mission. This we may gather from the Lord's words that follow, "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." Already the Lord has viewed the disciples as in His position before the Father; now He views them as having His place before the world.

(V. 19). Now we learn that there is a second way by which the Lord effects our practical sanctification. Verse 17 has told us of the sanctifying effect of the truth. Here the Lord speaks of sanctifying Himself that we might be sanctified through the truth. The Lord sets Himself apart in the glory to become an Object to attract our hearts outside this present world. We have not only the truth to enlighten our minds, search our consciences, and encourage us in the path, but we have, in Christ in the glory, a living Person to powerfully affect our hearts. Attracted by His excellencies, and held by His love, we shall find ourselves increasingly sanctified by the truth that is livingly set forth in Him.

(Vv. 20, 21). At this point in the prayer the Lord very blessedly thinks of all those who will believe on Him through the Apostles' word. He looks down the long ages and brings within the scope of His requests all those who will compose His assembly. In connection with this wider circle the Lord adds a second request for unity, yet differing somewhat from the first request. There the unity was limited to the Apostles, and it was a request that they might be "one as We." Here, taking in the wider circle, it is a request that they might be "one in Us." This surely is a unity formed by their common interest in the Father and the Son. In social position, intellectual abilities, or material wealth, there may be, and will be, great differences, but the Lord prays that "In Us" —the Father and the Son—they may be one. This oneness was to be a testimony to the world—an evident proof that the Father must have sent the Son to effect such a result. Was there not at Pentecost a partial answer to this prayer when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul"?

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 17:1-5: The Father Glorified in the Son

John 17:1-5

EVERY utterance, and every request, in the 9 first five verses of chapter 17 has in view the glory of the Father. Wherever the Son is viewed, whether on earth, in heaven, or on the cross—between earth and heaven, His first and great desire is to glorify the Father. Such purity of motive is beyond the conception of fallen man. The natural thought is to use power, whatever form it may take, to glorify self. Such was the thought of His brethren, after the flesh, when they said, "If Thou do these things shew Thyself to the world" (John 7:4). What is this but saying in effect, "Use your power to glorify yourself?" Alas! does not history show that whenever man is entrusted with power, whether by God or his fellow men, he uses it to glorify himself? Entrusted with power, the first head of the Gentiles encompasses his fall by saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty" (Dan 4:30 N. Tn). Well may all heaven unite to say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power," for He alone uses power for the glory of God, and the blessing of man. The Lord desires a glory far greater than this world can give, for He says, "O Father, glorify Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." And with this great glory He desires that He may glorify the Father.

(V. 2). Power had already been given to Him on earth, displayed in the raising of Lazarus, and used to the glory of God, As He said at the grave side, "If thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God" (John 11:40). Now the Lord asks for a glory that would be commensurate with His power. Power had been given Him over all flesh, that He should glorify God by carrying out the counsels of God. In this world we see the terrible power of the flesh energized by Satan, yet, for our comfort, we know from this prayer, that a power above every other power has been given to the Lord so that no power of evil, however great, can hinder Christ from carrying into effect the counsels of God to give eternal life to as many as the Father has given to the Son.

(V. 3). This life finds its highest expression in the knowledge and enjoyment of our relationships with the Father and the Son. It is not like the natural life, limited to the knowledge and enjoyment of natural things and human relationships: it is not confined to earth nor bound by time, nor ended by death. It is a life that enables us to know and enjoy communion with divine Persons. It carries us outside the world, above the earth, beyond time, and into the regions of eternal glory.

(V. 4). If, however, the Lord desires to glorify the Father in the new place in heaven, already He has done so in His path on earth, and in His sufferings on the cross. Who but the Lord could look up to heaven and say to the Father, "I have glorified Thee on the earth." Alas! fallen man has dishonored God on the earth. Man was made in the image and likeness of God, to be a true representative of God before the universe. If however, now that man has fallen, the world were to form its ideas of God from man, the conclusion would be reached that God is an unholy, selfish, cruel and vindictive Being, without wisdom, love, or compassion. This indeed is the terrible conclusion that the heathen has reached, through presuming that God is such an one as themselves. Thus they have fashioned gods that, like themselves, are filthy, cruel, and selfish. They have "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man." Thus instead of glorifying God by a true representation of God, man has dishonored God on the earth. When, however, we turn from man fallen to the Man Christ Jesus—the Son—we see One who, in every step of His path, has glorified God. Born into this world, the heavenly host can say, as they gaze upon their Maker, "Glory to God in the highest." Now, at the completion of His path, the Lord can say, "I have glorified Thee on the earth." He fully set forth the character of God, and fully maintained all that was due to God; He upheld His glory before the whole universe. In Christ God was manifest in flesh, seen of angels as well as seen of man.

Moreover Christ not only glorified God in His path on earth, but above all, He glorified God on the Cross, for He can say, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." There He maintained the righteousness of God in relation to sin, and displayed the love of God to the

sinner.

Here Christ speaks according to the perfect Manhood He had taken. As Man He had glorified God, and finished the work given Him to do. As believers it is our privilege to walk as He walked—to be here for the glory of God, and to finish the work given us to do, though never forgetting that the work He came to do at the Cross must forever stand alone. None but the Son could undertake, and finish, that great work.

(V. 5). In verse 5 we listen to requests in which no man can have part, for here the Lord speaks as the eternal Son, and makes requests in which only One who is God can have His part. First the Lord can say, “O Father glorify Thou Me.” We may indeed desire to have our bodies of glory, that Christ may be glorified in us (2 Thess. 1:10), and thus say “Glorify Christ in me,” but who save a divine Person could say, “Glorify Me?”

Secondly, the prayer rises to a higher plane, for the Lord adds, “With thine own self.” Only the Eternal Son, who dwelt in the bosom of the Father could ask for glory commensurate with the glory of the Father. The One who speaks thus claims equality with the Father.

Moreover, when the Lord proceeds to speak of “the glory which I had,” He claims a glory which He possessed in eternity as a divine Person—not a glory that He received, but a glory that He had. Then He can say “the glory which I had with Thee,” an expression which involves not only that He was a divine Person, but also a distinct Person in the Godhead. Finally He speaks of this glory as the glory He had with the Father “before the world was.” It was outside of time; it belonged to eternity. He was a divine Person, a distinct Person in the Godhead, and He was an Eternal Person. It has been truly said, “We hear Him speaking in full consciousness of being the same before the world was and now, and of a glory which He had as His own in the eternal fellowship with God.”

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 16:16-33: The New Day

John 16:16-33

THE Lord has finished the portion of His discourse that unfolds to the disciples the great illumination of mind that will result from the coming of the Holy Spirit. Now, as the discourses draw to their close, He speaks no longer of the Spirit, but of “that day” —the new day about to dawn—with its new revelation of Himself in resurrection (16-22); the new character of intercourse they would have with the Father (23, 24); and the new form in which the Lord would communicate with them (25-28).

We do well to remember that the two events that distinguish “that day” are, the departure of Christ to be with the Father and the coming of the Spirit to dwell in believers. In the portion of the discourse that has just closed, “that day” is viewed in connection with the coming of the Comforter. In this latter portion of the discourse, “that day” is viewed in connection with Christ going to the Father, and all that is involved in His being with the Father.

(V. 16). Wonderful intimations of coming glories to be revealed in the power of the Spirit, have passed before the disciples, but, as the last moments with the disciples slip away, they are left with Jesus Himself as the Object of their affections. The Spirit will indeed draw out these affections, but never is He, like Jesus, the object of them. Thus it is that the Lord engages their hearts with Himself, as He says, “A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me.” In these words not only does the Lord engage their hearts with Himself, but He intimates the great events so close at hand, and prepares their hearts for the changes these events would bring.

(Vv. 17, 18). The Lord’s words raise anxious inquiry amongst the disciples, making manifest that every statement was to them a mystery. It is noticeable that as the discourses proceed the disciples grow silent. Five of the disciples have spoken on occasions, but since leaving the upper room no other voice save the Lord’s has been heard. As the great truths of the coming of the Spirit were unfolded, they had listened in silence to that which was so far beyond their comprehension. Now, as the Lord again speaks of Himself, their hearts are stirred to know the meaning of His words. Yet, even so, they speak among themselves, hesitating to utter their difficulties to the Lord.

(Vv. 19-22). The Lord anticipates their desire to ask the meaning of His words, and, not only throws further light upon what He has said, but also tells them how their hearts would be affected, both in sorrow and joy, by the great events so close at hand.

The Lord’s words clearly speak of two short intervals of time, and intimate that soon the disciples would not see Him, and then that they would see Him again. In the light of the events that follow can we not say that these words indicate that, at that moment, there were but a few short hours before the Lord would leave His disciples to pass out of the sight of man, as He goes into the darkness of the Cross and the tomb? Again after a second “little while” the disciples would see the Lord, and yet not as before, in the days of His flesh, but in resurrection. If they would see Him no more as in the days of His humiliation, they would see Him for evermore in the new and glorious resurrection condition beyond death and the grave. It would however, be the same Jesus, who had dwelt among them, borne with their weakness, sustained their faith, and won their hearts, that would come into their midst and say, “Behold My hands and My feet that it is I Myself.”

Moreover the Lord tells His disciples how these changing events will effect them in sorrow and joy. The little while during which they will not see Him, will be a time of overwhelming grief for the disciples—a time of weeping and lamenting for one dead, whose grave was the end of all their earthly hopes. The world, indeed, would rejoice, thinking they had triumphed over One whose presence exposed the evil of their deeds. Nevertheless, when the little while is ended, their sorrow will be turned to joy.

To bring home to the hearts of the disciples these coming events, the Lord uses the illustration of the woman bringing forth her child. The sudden sorrow, the change from anguish to joy, and the birth of the child, exactly sets forth the sudden anguish which would overwhelm the disciples when the Lord has passed into death, even as it illustrates the quick change from anguish to joy, when once again they see the risen Lord as the Firstborn from the dead.

The Lord, in applying His illustration, enlarges upon His words. Already He has said, “Ye shall see Me,” now He adds, “I will see you again.” The world would not see Him, nor would He see the world again. It is to His own that He would come. And so it came to pass, as we read, later on, Jesus stood in the midst and said unto them, Peace be unto you; and when He had so said He showed them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord (20:19, 20).

Moreover, the seeing of which the Lord speaks can hardly be confined to the fleeting visits during the forty days after the resurrection. It has been well said, “The risen and living Lord showed Himself to the eye of sense, that He might remain before the eye of faith, not as a memory but as a presence,” and again “It was a seeing that could never be lost or dimmed, but on the contrary grew clearer as it became; more spiritual.” Throughout the time of His absence, while we are yet on earth, and He in the glory, the words of the Lord will ever be true, “Ye shall see Me,” and “I will see you.” Looking steadfastly into that glory, Stephen can say, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.” Again, the writer to the Hebrews can say, “We see Jesus... crowned with glory and honor.”

It is this special vision of Christ that secures the joy of the believer. “The living Lord is the joy of His people; and because His life is eternal, their joy is permanent and secure.” Thus the Lord can say, “Your joy no man taketh from you.”

(Vv. 23, 24). The Lord has spoken of the new revelation of Himself in the new day so soon to dawn; now He speaks of the new character of intercourse that would become the new day. “In that day,” says the Lord, “ye shall ask Me nothing” —words that do not imply that we are never to address the Lord, but rather that we have direct access to the Father. Martha had no sense of directly speaking to the Father, when she said, “I know that... whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee.” (John 11:22). We have not now to appeal to the Lord to go to the Father on our behalf, but it is our privilege to directly ask of the Father in the name of Christ. Hitherto the disciples had asked nothing in His name. “In that day” they shall ask in His name, and the Father would give in His name, that their joy might be full. In using the vast resources thus opened to them they would find fullness of joy.

(V. 25). Furthermore, on the Lord’s side, His communications would take a new character. Hitherto much of His teaching had been given in the form of parables or allegories. In the day about to dawn He would speak plainly of the Father. Thus it was in the resurrection, when He sent a message to the disciples plainly saying, “I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.”

(Vv. 26, 28). Though the Lord will plainly tell us of the Father it will not be necessary for the Lord to pray the Father concerning us, as if the Father did not know our needs, or that we had not free access to the Father, for, says the Lord, “The Father Himself loveth you.” The Father has the deepest interest in the disciples, and loves them, because they loved Christ and believed that He had come forth from God.

The Lord closes this part of the discourse by affirming the great truths upon which the whole superstructure of Christianity is based, “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world and go to the Father.” Alas! professing Christendom, while affecting to make much of the perfect life of our Lord, is fast giving up the holy claims implied in this great affirmation. This assertion of His divine origin, of His mission in the world, and his return to the Father, fittingly brings the instruction of the discourses to their end.

(V. 27-32). The closing words are not so much instruction as a final word of warning as to the weakness of the disciples, followed by a word that reveals the feelings of the Lord’s heart, and the last word of encouragement.

The disciples, in the presence of this plain affirmation of the truth, can say, “Lo, now speakest Thou plainly and speakest no allegory.” The truth that they had seen but dimly, now becomes definite and clear by the plain words of the Lord. And yet how little they understood the way of death by which the Lord was returning to the Father. Thus the Lord can say, “Do ye now believe?” They did indeed believe, but, like ourselves, too often, they but little knew their own weakness. The Lord has to warn them that the hour was coming, yea had indeed come, when all the disciples would be scattered every man to his own, and the One in whom they had just professed to believe, would be left alone.

Yet if there comes a time when these companions of His life, who have loved and followed Him, think only of themselves and flee from Him in the hour of His trial, He will not be alone, for, as the Lord says, “the Father is with Me.” He does not say the Father will be with Me, however true, but “the Father is with Me.” As in the days of old, in the scene which was but a shadow of this far greater scene, we read of Abraham and Isaac, as they took their way to Mount Moriah, “they went both of them together” (Gen. 22:6). So now the Father and the Son are together, as the great sacrifice is approached.

(V. 33). Nevertheless, if the Lord will warn the disciples of their weakness, He will not leave them without one last word of cheer and encouragement. Whatever failure in themselves they may have to deplore, whatever trials in the world they may have to meet, yet, in Christ they would have peace. They may find much in themselves, and much in the world to disturb them, but in Christ they would have an unfailing resource—One in whom their hearts could rest in perfect peace. The world may indeed overcome the disciples, as they are shortly to prove, but Christ has overcome the world.

Thus the disciples, and ourselves, may be of good cheer, for the One who loves us, who lives for us, who is coming for us—the One who is with us—is the One who has overcome the world. Thus as the great discourses reach their end we are left with a word of encouragement that, lifting us above all our failure, leaves us in the contemplation of the victory of the Lord.

The Hope.

“Look up, and lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh” —Luke 21:28.

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 16:12-15: The World to Come Revealed

LEAVING the present world the Lord passes in thought into a region of which He has many things to say, though, at the moment, beyond the capacity of the disciples to comprehend. Howbeit when the Spirit of truth is come, He will unfold to the disciples “things to come.” “He will guide into all truth.” If we are to be faithful witnesses for Christ in this world, it is not enough to know the true character of this present world, we must also have the light of another world to guide our steps through this dark world.

While, however, the Spirit brings to light the glories of the new world, He does not bring them into actual display. Christ, Himself, when He comes, will bring these glorious things into display. By the Spirit, faith walks in the present light of future glories. The morning Star arises in our hearts before the Son of righteousness shines forth upon the world.

Moreover the Lord does not suggest that the coming of the Spirit of truth would alter the course of this present world. His presence condemns the world, His guiding delivers believers from present things by giving us the light of things to come. Alas many may seek to use Christianity for the betterment of this world, only to find that such efforts result in Christianity being corrupted, and the evil of the world being glossed over with a religious veneer. Nor does the Lord suggest that the coming of the Spirit would ensure the worldly comfort and earthly prosperity of His people while passing through this world. There may often be great disparity among the Lord’s people as to their circumstances and surroundings in this world, but, as regards the true riches of the world of the Father’s counsels they are on common ground. The present light of the world of glory is the portion of all the saints. Whatever our circumstances in this life, it is at least open to us to enter into and enjoy, in spirit, the surpassing and eternal glories of the world to come, into which we shall so soon actually enter.

In view of carrying our hearts into this new world we read that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all the truth. The full range of truth, as to the purpose of God, the glory of Christ in the Church, the blessing of the Church with Christ, and the blessing of men in the Kingdom throughout Millennial days, right on to the glories of the new heaven and the new earth, is available for us in the power of the Holy Spirit. Into this vast range of truth He will guide us; but He will not force, nor drive us. The question for each one is, as with Rebekah of old, “Wilt thou go?” The servant was present ready to lead her to Isaac, even as the Spirit has come to lead us to Christ. The servant could say, “Hinder me not... that I may go to my master;” and may we not say the desire of the Holy Spirit is, not to better this world or settle the saints in this scene, but to return to the One from whom He has come, taking with Him the Bride for Christ. Alas! we often hinder the Holy Spirit by turning aside into some path of our own choosing and thus lose the guiding of the Holy Spirit. Some worldly entanglement, or some wrong religious association, may detain us, and until clear of this association the Spirit will cease to guide us into further truth. Christians appear to have little conception how easily the soul’s progress into truth may be hindered by unscriptural associations.

Not only does the Lord say the Spirit will guide, but three times He says, “He will show.” (Vv. 13, 14, 15). We cannot guide ourselves into all truth, we cannot show ourselves the things to come, or the things concerning Christ. We are entirely dependent upon the Spirit. How deeply important then to refuse at all cost anything that would hinder the Spirit leading us into the fullness of blessing.

Very explicitly the Lord tells us the threefold character of the blessing into which the Holy Spirit will lead us. First, verse 13 speaks of “things to come;” then, in verse 14, we read of the glories of Christ; finally, in verse 15, there passes before us, “All things that the Father hath.” These are the things into which the Holy Spirit will guide us if we hinder Him not. He will unroll before us all the blessedness of the world to come; He will take of the glories of Christ and show them unto us; He will disclose to us the whole range of the Father’s counsels which have Christ for their center.

Would that we realized more fully that there is a world of bliss entirely outside the sphere of natural sight, and beyond the range of the human mind—things of which it is said, “Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:9, 10).

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 16:8-11: The Present World Exposed

John 16:8-11

FROM this point in the discourse, the Lord resumes the instruction of the last two verses of chapter 15 in reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit. In the intervening verses the Lord had spoken of the witness of the disciples and the persecution it would involve. He resumes this great theme with the words, “When He is come,” an expression used before in chapter 15:26, and again in 16:13. In each case it marks a fresh stage of instruction. In chapter 16:8, His coming demonstrates the true character of the world. In chapter 16:13, He comes to guide the believer into the truth of another world.

Before that other world is revealed the true character of this world is exposed, and so we read, “When He is come He will bring demonstration to the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” No question is raised as to who receives the demonstration, but the fact is stated that the presence of the Holy Spirit demonstrates the true character of the world. As a matter of fact it is not the world, as such, that receives the demonstration, but those in whom the Spirit dwells, though they indeed use what they have learned to witness to the world of its true condition.

The presence of the Spirit does not test the world. The world has been fully tested by the presence of Christ. He was here in such manner that the world could see His works of grace, and hear His words of love; and the Lord sums up the result of this testing by saying, “They have both seen and hated both Me and My Father.” When the Spirit comes the world cannot receive Him, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him. Nevertheless to believers—those in whom He dwells—He brings demonstration of the result of the testing, so that the believers, instructed by the Spirit, have no false conceptions of the world. They know by the Spirit’s teaching the true character of the world as seen by God. Its character is demonstrated in respect of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. This conviction is wrought in the soul, not by the use of abstract statements, but by an appeal to the Lord Jesus and the great facts of His history.

First, its state is proved in respect of sin. The presence of the Spirit is in itself a proof of the evil state of the world, for if Christ had not been rejected the Holy Spirit would not be here. His presence is a proof that the world has hated, cast out, and crucified the Son of God. Jew and Gentile, representing the world religiously and politically, combined in saying, "Away with Him, crucify Him." It is therefore a world that does not believe in Christ, and this solemn fact proves it is under sin. We might understand the world not believing in anyone else, but if the world does not believe in Christ—One with whom they could find no fault—it is a clear proof that it must be dominated by an evil principle which God calls sin.

The final and absolute demonstration that the world is under sin is seen, not in the fact that men have transgressed certain laws of God, or defiled the temple and stoned the prophets, but in that, when God was manifested down here in all the grace, love, power and goodness on behalf of guilty man, as set forth in the Son become flesh and dwelling amongst men, the world finally and formally rejected God by refusing to believe in His Son. This is the outstanding fact that demonstrates the sin of the world. However fair the exterior of this world may look at times, whatever advances it may make in civilization and invention, the fact remains that the presence of the Spirit proves that it is a world that does not believe in Christ, and therefore a world under sin.

Secondly, the evil condition of the world is proved in respect of righteousness: The presence of the Spirit proves not only the absence of Christ from the world, but also the presence of Christ in the glory. If Christ's absence is the greatest proof of sin, His presence in the glory is the greatest expression of righteousness. The sin of men rose to its height when the world put the sinless One upon the Cross. Righteousness is seen, on the one hand, in that Christ, who was nailed to the Cross, has gone back to the Father; and on the other hand, in that the world as such will see Him no more. It is only right that He should have the highest place in the glory: it is only right that the world, that saw and hated Him without a cause, should see Him no more. Thus it is demonstrated that the world is under sin and without righteousness.

Thirdly, the Spirit brings demonstration of judgment because the prince of this world is judged. Behind the sin of man there is the craft of Satan. Man is but the tool of the devil: God has counseled to set Christ in the place of supreme power in the universe. The devil has set himself to thwart the purposes of God; and from the garden of Eden to the Cross at Calvary, he has used man as his tool to carry out his plans. At the Cross it looked as if the devil had triumphed, for there he succeeded in using man to nail to the cross of shame the very One that God has destined for a throne of glory. But the presence of the Spirit brings demonstration that, in spite of all that the world, moved by the prince of the world, has done, Christ is in the highest place in glory. God has triumphed over man's sin and the devil's power. The place of glory in which Christ is set is the proof that the devil has been defeated in the greatest expression of his power. This must mean the final and absolute judgment of the devil; and if the devil is judged, the whole world system of which he is the ruler, will come under judgment. The judgment is not yet executed, but morally it stands condemned with its ruler.

Such then is the state of the world under the eye of God, demonstrated by the presence of the Spirit. It is a world under sin, without righteousness and going on to judgment.

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 16:5-7: The Necessity of Christ's Departure

John 16:5-7

IF, however, the disciples were to be instructed in the mind of the Lord, it was necessary that He should depart and that the Comforter should come. The Lord recognized their affection for Himself, and in tenderness felt for them in the sorrow that filled their hearts as they thought of the parting with Himself. Nevertheless, knowing the immense benefit they would derive from the coming of the Spirit, He can say, "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." We may be slow to realize the immense blessing to ourselves, and the glory to Christ, that flows from the presence of the Spirit, but it should raise our esteem for the gift of the Spirit when we see in what high estimation the gift of the Spirit was held by the Lord. Blessed indeed must have been the company of the Lord in His earthly pathway; blessed to see His works of power and hear His words of love, behold His excellencies and experience His care, nevertheless His going away would be greater gain, for by the coming of the Spirit believers can be lead into a yet deeper acquaintance with Christ, a richer appreciation of His excellencies, and, above all, the knowledge of Christ in exaltation as a Man in the glory.

To know Christ in the glory by the Spirit, must be far more blessed than the knowledge of Christ on earth after the flesh. It involves a union with Christ in resurrection impossible while He was present on earth. Union with a Man in Heaven is more blessed than company with a Man on earth. Yet occupation with the immediate sorrow of losing the Lord, blinded the disciples to the blessing that God had for them through the sorrow.

We may gather from this a principle of wide application—that, pre-occupation with present circumstances hides from us God's purposes of future blessing, wrought out through the sorrowful circumstances. The disciples' pre-occupation with their immediate sorrow hid from their eyes the great fact that, by the departure of the Lord, He was going to open a way into the unfolding of all the vast counsels of God for the glory of Christ and the blessing of His people.

It is often thus with ourselves. Pre-occupied with some present painful circumstances, we overlook the blessing and enlargement of soul into which God has purposed to lead us through these very circumstances. We forget that word which says, "Thou hast enlarged me, when I was in distress" (Psa. 4:1.).

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 16:1-4: Persecution From the Religious World

John 16:1-4

IN the previous discourse the Lord had set before His disciples the marks of the new Christian company, whose privilege it would be to bear fruit for the Father, and bear witness to Christ in a world from which Christ is absent.

(V. 1). Those, however, who, in any measure, wear the character of Christ, and bear witness to Christ in a Christ-hating world, will assuredly have to face something of the suffering, and persecution, that is brought before us in the opening verses of this chapter. The thoughtful and tender love of the Lord, anticipating the suffering of His own, gives them this loving warning lest, when persecution arose, they might be offended. If unwarned their natural prejudices, formed by their links with the dispensation that was closing, together with their ignorance of the new Christian era about to dawn, might become a cause of stumbling when faced with persecution. How needed the warning, the after-history of the disciples will prove.

John the Baptist, in his day, came nigh to being offended. His faith received a severe shock by treatment that was so foreign to his thoughts. As the result of his faithful witness he finds himself in prison, and, being ignorant of the mind of the Lord, he sends a message to the Lord, "Art Thou He that should come," to receive the answer, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me." With this danger the disciples were faced. Filled with the false hope of the immediate redemption of Israel, they would hardly be prepared for persecution from Israel. Their false expectations exposed them to the danger of being offended.

(Vv. 2, 3). The Lord's warning prepares them not only for persecution, but for religious persecution. The disciples of Christ would be put out of the synagogue, involving the loss of all fellowship whether in the family, social or political circle (John 9:22). This religious persecution would proceed from religious motives. "Whosoever killeth you will think that He doeth God service." Hence the greater the sincerity, the more ruthless the persecution. But this persecution would proceed from ignorance of the Father and the Son. And thus it has been with every form of religious persecution. It has been truly said, "As it was with the Jews who persecuted Christians, so with the Christians who have persecuted Christians. Things have been done 'to the glory of God,' and 'in the name of Christ,' of which He who looks down from heaven could only say, 'They have not known the Father nor Me.'"

(V. 4). In the days to come the persecution would become an occasion of recalling the Lord's words and comforting the disciples' hearts with a fresh sense of the omniscience that foreknew, and the love that forewarned. Hitherto the necessity to speak of these things had not arisen, for the Lord was present to shelter and guard them. These things belonged to the time of His absence, not the time of His presence.

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 15:26-27: The Power for Witnessing

John 15:26, 27

If the circle of love is surrounded by a circle of hate—a persecuting world that hates the disciples of Christ with a blind hatred—how will any testimony for Christ be maintained on the earth, when Christ Himself has gone?

The Christian circle is small, and those who compose it are weak. The Lord Himself likens it to a little flock in the midst of wolves. By what power then will the disciples stand against a Christ-hating world and bear witness for Christ? They can stand, and they will stand, in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, a divine Person who will come from the Father.

How well the Lord knew the terrible character of the world and its relentless hatred, for had not the storm of its enmity broken in its full fury upon Him? He knew well, too, the weakness of those who loved Him and had followed Him, for was not Peter going to deny Him, and all forsake Him? How well He knew that left to themselves, they would never be able to maintain any testimony for Him, when He had left them for the glory. Knowing the wickedness of the world and the weakness of the disciples He says, "I will send" unto you the Comforter "from the Father even the Spirit of truth," and the Lord adds "He shall testify of Me." However weak the disciples may be, however strong the world may be, "He shall testify of Me." However much the disciples may fail, however much the world may persecute, "He shall testify of Me." He will testify on earth of the glory of the Son in heaven. The world will crucify Him in the lowest place on earth, heaven will crown Him in the highest place in glory, and the Holy Spirit would come to bear witness of His glory. The Son had come from the Father to bear witness of the Father: the Holy Spirit was coming from the Father to bear witness to the Son.

In view of the coming of the Spirit the Lord can add, "Ye also shall bear witness," and gives as a further reason, "Because ye have been with Me from the beginning." It is true we have not been with Jesus in the same literal sense in which the disciples had companied with Him from the beginning of His ministry, nevertheless, it remains true in a moral sense, that, if we are to bear witness for Christ before men, we too must be with Christ in secret. When the Holy Spirit had come, Peter and John bore such a striking witness to Christ before the persecuting religious world, that their persecutors "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Thus the Lord brings us two great facts, one that the Holy Spirit bears testimony to Christ in the glory; the other, that the disciples bear witness before men. Are not these two facts strikingly illustrated in the history of Stephen. Surrounded by a Christ-rejecting religious world, maddened by hatred, gnashing upon him with their teeth, and persecuting him with their stones, he stands firm in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, and, looking up into heaven, sees the glory of God and Jesus; then he bears witness before the world, "Behold," he says, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." The Holy Spirit bears testimony in Stephen's spirit to Christ in the glory, and Stephen bears witness before the world.

Stephen was the first of a long line of martyrs, but in spite of all that the world has done, or will yet do, we may with all confidence say there has been, and will be, a witness for Christ while the Christian company is on earth, for the one great reason that the Holy Spirit is present on earth and abides in and with God's people in all His mighty and irresistible power.

The Witness.

“If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” —John 15:7, 8.

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 15:18-25: The World

John 15:18-25

VERY blessedly, (V. 18, 19.) the Lord has presented to us the new Christian company, not indeed in its formation or administration (for this the time had not yet come), but, in its moral marks and spiritual privileges. It is seen as a company governed by the love of Christ and, abiding in His love, bound together by love to one another. In the words that follow, the Lord passes in thought outside the Christian circle of love to speak of the world circle of hate, thus warning His disciples of the true character of the world, by which they will be surrounded, and preparing them for its persecution.

If we share with Christ the love, joy, and holy intimacies of the inside circle, we must also be prepared to share with Christ in His hatred and reproach from the world. There is no suggestion that the disciples should attempt to make the best of two worlds, as men speak. It must be Christ or the world, it cannot be Christ and the world. A company that in any way exhibits the graces of Christ would be recognized by the world as identified with Christ, and the hatred which the world had expressed to Christ, would be shown to His people. His hatred, and His persecution, would be theirs.

The world is a vast system embracing every race and class, and false religion, having in common their hatred of God. The world by which the disciples were immediately surrounded was the world of corrupt Judaism. Today the world with which believers are mainly in contact is the world of corrupt Christendom. Its outward form may change from age to age; at heart it is ever marked by alienation from God and hatred to Christ.

Why should these simple men be hated by the world? Were they not mainly a company of poor people who loved one another, who lived in an orderly way, being subject to the powers, without interfering with their politics? Did they not go about proclaiming good news, and doing good deeds? Why should such be hated?

The Lord gives two reasons for this hatred. First, they were a company of people that Christ had chosen out of the world: second, they were a company of people who confessed the name of Christ before the world (V. 21). The first cause would more particularly call forth the hatred of the religious world: the second the hatred of the world in general. Through all time nothing has so enraged religious man as the sovereign grace that, passing by all man's religious efforts, picks up and blesses the outcast and the wretched. The very mention of the grace of other days, that blessed a Gentile widow, and a Gentile leper, led the religious leaders of Nazareth to rise up in wrath and hatred against Christ. The sovereign grace that blesses the younger son, enrages the elder son.

(V. 20, 21). Further the disciples are warned that this hatred will manifest itself in persecution, “If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” This active expression of hatred is more directly connected with the confession of the name of Christ, for the Lord can say, “All these things will they do unto you for My name's sake.” The persecution, whether of Christ or His disciples, proved they had no knowledge of the One that sent Christ—the Father.

(Vv. 22-25). There is, however, no excuse for such ignorance. The Lord's words, and the Lord's works, left the world without excuse either for hatred or ignorance. If Christ had not come and spoken unto the world words such as never man had spoken; if He had not done among them works which none other man had done, they could not have been reproached with the sin of willful enmity against Christ and the Father. They would still have been fallen creatures, but it would hardly have been demonstrated that they were willful and God-hating creatures. But now there was no cloak for their sin. There was no hiding the fact of the world's guilt: it had come out. Christ had fully revealed, by His words and works, all the Father's heart. It only brought out man's hatred of God. The world as such was left without hope, for, according to their own law, they hated Christ without a cause. Thus the world's hatred is no longer ignorance: it is sin. It is a causeless hatred. Alas! we, even as Christians, may at times give the world cause for hatred, but in Christ there was no cause. There is, indeed, a cause for the hatred, but it lies not in the One that is hated, but in the hearts of those who hate.

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 15:9-17: The Christian Company

John 15:9-17

IN the last discourses of the Lord there is a progressive unfolding of the truth, which prepares the disciples for the setting aside of the earthly Jewish system, with which they had been connected, and the introduction of the new Christian company, heavenly in origin and destiny, though left for a while in the world to represent Christ—the Man in the glory.

As we listen to the Lord's utterances, we do well to keep in mind the two great facts that underlie the whole teaching of the farewell words. First, the great fact, repeatedly brought before us, that the Lord was about to leave the world in view of taking a new place as Man in heaven; second, the fact that a divine Person—the Holy Spirit—was coming from heaven to earth. Consequent upon these two great facts there would be found in this world a company of believers united to Christ in the glory, and to one another by the Holy Spirit. It is to this new company, represented by the disciples, that the Lord addresses Himself in these last words.

Having revealed to His disciples the desire of His heart that they should bear fruit—the expression of His own lovely character—in a world from which He will be absent, He now presents before them the new Christian company in which alone fruit can be found. Is it not plain that

the full expression of fruit demands a company; for many of the graces of Christ could hardly be expressed by a disciple in isolation? Longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, and other traits of Christ, can only have their practical expression as we are found in company with others. In the opening verse of John 13 we are told that during the absence of Christ there are those on earth that He calls "His own," and that He loves them to the end. The fact that He loves them to the end proves that in spite of all failure, they will exist to the end. Outwardly "His own" may be broken and scattered but under His eye they still remain. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." Happy for those believers who delight in the company of "His own." If Christ personally were present on earth we should all like to be in His company; but if He is gone we shall surely like to be with those who express something of His character. If, in the midst of all the confusion of Christendom, we can still find a few who, without any pretension, morally set forth something of Christ they will surely be very attractive to the heart that loves Christ; while the great religious systems of men, in which there is so much of man and so little of Christ, will cease to attract.

How important then that we should give earnest heed to a passage that unfolds to us the great moral features of the new Christian company that forms Christ's Assembly during His absence. In speaking of the Christian company we must beware of narrowing it down to a limited number of saints on the one hand, or enlarging it to include those that are not Christ's on the other.

(V. 9, 10). The first and greatest mark of the Christian company is the love of Christ. The Christian company is loved by Christ. They may be almost unknown by the world, or if known despised and hated, but they are loved by Christ; and such the depth of His love, that it can only be measured by the Father's love to Christ. The Father had looked down upon Christ as a Man on earth, and loved Him with all the perfection of divine love; and now Christ, from the glory, looks upon His own in this world, and, through the opened heavens, there streams down upon them the love of Christ.

To such the Lord says, "Abide in My love." Their enjoyment of their blessings, as well as their power in testimony, will depend upon their abiding in the conscious sense of the love of Christ. Those other solemn words of the Lord, "Thou hast left thy first love," addressed to the angel of the Church of Ephesus at a later day, indicate the first step on the road that leads to the ruin and scattering of the Christian company on earth. Their next downward step was they ceased to give a united testimony to Christ—the candlestick was removed (Rev. 2:4, 5). When Christians walked in the enjoyment of divine love, nothing could stand against their united testimony. When they lost their first love to Christ, through losing the sense of Christ's love to them, they soon ceased to present a united testimony before the world. How often has the history of the Church as a whole been repeated in local companies of the saints. If, however, any would answer to the Lord's words and continue in His love, let them take heed to the Lord's directions, for He points the way. We can only continue in His love as we walk in the path of obedience, "If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love." The child that pursues his own will, in disobedience to the parent, has very little appreciation, or enjoyment, of the parent's love.

So with the Christian; it is only as we walk in obedience to the Lord's revealed mind that we shall retain the enjoyment of the Lord's love.

It has been well said, that we keep ourselves in the love of Christ "as one would abide in the sunshine by keeping in the place where the sunshine falls. The love of Christ rests on the way of obedience, and shines along the path of His commandments. The keeping His commandments does not create the love, any more than walking in sunny places creates the sunshine; and accordingly the exhortation is not to seek, or merit, or obtain the love, but to remain in it." The Lord, Himself, was the perfect example of One who trod the path of obedience, for He could say, "I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

(V. 11). The second great mark of the Christian company is "joy:" but it is Christ's joy. The Lord can say, "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." This is not mere natural joy, still less the joy of the world. It is Christ's joy, a joy that flowed from the "uninterrupted sense and enjoyment of the Father's love." There are, indeed, earthly joys which are sanctioned by God and, in their place and time, can be rightly used; but such joys will fail us, "Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away." The wine of earthly joy runs out. We may indeed "drink of the brook in the way," but the brook in the way dries up. (Psa. 110:7; 1 Kings 17:7.) There is however a fountain of joy within the believer that springs up into life eternal and will never fail. Thus it is the Lord can speak of His joy as that which can "remain" in us. This indeed is a joy that will outlast the passing joys of time—the joy that "remains." The joy that has its source in the Father's love will be as lasting as the love from which it springs.

Moreover the joy of which the Lord speaks is not only a joy that remains, but He can say to His disciples it will be "in you." Being in us it is not like the joy of this world, dependent upon outward circumstances. The Psalmist could say, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased" (Psa. 4:7). Earthly joys depend on the prosperity of outward circumstances; the gladness of the Lord is in the heart. In His outward circumstances the Lord was an outcast Man and lonely—the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. In His pathway of perfect obedience to the Father's will, He abode in the constant realization of the Father's love, and in that love He found the constant spring of all His joy. We too, in as far as we walk in obedience to the Lord, shall abide in the realization of His love, and, in the sunshine of His love we shall not only find His joy, but, a fullness of joy that leaves no room for grieving over the failure of all things earthly.

(Vv. 12, 13). Thirdly the new company is characterized by love. It is not only loved, but is a company that loves, for this is the Lord's command, "That ye love one another as I have loved you." This love is not to be after a human pattern, which oftentimes is a selfish love; but a love that has no less standard than the Lord's love to us, a love in which there is nothing of self, for the Lord can say, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Here death is viewed, not in its atoning character, but, as the supreme expression of love. Earthly love is often drawn out by something in its object that is lovable. Divine love rises above all our weaknesses and failures and loves in spite of so much that is unlovely. Such is the love of Christ, and such is the love that we should cherish toward one another. A love that is not indifferent to failures and blemishes, but, rising above all that is unlovely, serves its object even to making the greatest possible sacrifice—the laying down of life for a friend. As one has said, "No greater proof of love can be given; no higher standard set."

(Vv. 14, 15). Fourthly the Christian company is a trusted company enriched with the confidences of Christ and the secret counsels of the Father's heart. The Lord treats His own not merely as servants, to whom directions are given, but as friends to whom secrets are communicated, for the Lord can say, "All things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you." It is not indeed that the disciples were not servants of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1; Rom. 1:1). But they were more than servants, they were friends, and, if "the privilege of being servants is great, that of being friends is greater." The servant, as such, "knoweth not what His Lord doeth." He only knows the task allotted to him, and is only given the needed directions for its performance. The servant who is treated as a friend knows more; he is

told the secret purpose of His Master for which the work is undertaken. And yet more, for a friend is one to whom we speak of our affairs knowing they will be of deepest interest to him though not directly concerning him. Thus it was that God treated Abraham—the man who is called the friend of God—He says “Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do.” But again we see that obedience to the Lord’s commands secures the place of a friend, as before it retained the enjoyment of love. We shall know little of the counsels of the Father’s heart unless we walk in obedience to the Lord’s commands. Being in the path of obedience the Lord treats us as friends by the confidences to which He admits us, communicating to us all that He has heard of the Father.

(V. 16). Fifthly the Christian company is a chosen company, as the Lord says, “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.” The choice was on His side, not ours. Blessed that it is so: had we, in some moment of emotional enthusiasm, chosen the Lord as our Master to go and bring forth fruit, we should, under the stress of circumstances, long since have turned back. The volunteers, that at times crossed the path of the Lord, received but small encouragement, and went but a little way with One who had not where to lay His head, and was ever in reproach with men. But of those He called He could say, “Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations” (Luke 6:13; 9:1; 22:28). Here it is surely no question of the sovereign choice to eternal life, but the love that chose and ordained us to bring forth fruit on earth, and that the fruit should abide. Blessedly fulfilled in the Apostles, for the graces of Christ expressed in their lives have made them examples to the flock for all time.

(V. 16). Lastly the Christian company is a praying and dependent company having access to the Father in the name of Christ. Enjoying the love of Christ, and admitted to the confidences of Christ as His friends, they will be so instructed in His mind, that whatsoever they ask of the Father in the name of Christ, He will be able to give.

Such is the Christian circle according to the mind of the Lord. A circle in which all that is Christ’s can be known and enjoyed, for how sweetly the little word “My” falls on our ears from the lips of the Lord. Connected with His own He can say, “My love,” “My joy,” “My commandments,” “My friends,” “My Father,” and “My name.” Here too, as one has said, is found the “whole history of love in the love of the Father to the Son, the love of Jesus to His people, the love of His people to one another; each stage being both the source and the standard of the next.”

The picture of the Christian company, as thus portrayed by the Lord, is indeed beautiful, but alas we seek in vain to find any general practical expression of the Lord’s desires amongst His people. Even so, divided and scattered though we be, let us not order our walk by any lower standard but each seek individually to answer to the mind of the Lord.

(V. 17). “These things,” of which the Lord has been speaking, were introduced with the love of Christ to His own; their end is to bind the disciples together in love to one another. Thus we can appreciate the fitness of the Lord’s words. “These things I command you, that ye love one another.”

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 15:1-8: Fruit-Bearing

John 15:1-8

THE Lord introduces the subject of fruit-bearing with the words, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman.” Such words would have a strange sound in the ears of the Eleven, accustomed, as they were, by the Psalms and the Prophets, to think of Israel as the vine. The 80th Psalm had spoken of Israel as a vine brought out of Egypt. Isaiah, in the song of the Beloved touching His vineyard, sets forth, under the figure of the vine, the love and care which Jehovah has bestowed upon Israel. Jeremiah speaks of Israel as “a noble vine.” Alas! Israel had brought forth no fruit for God. Isaiah mourns that they brought forth only “wild grapes:” and Jeremiah complains that the “noble vine” became “the degenerate plant of a strange vine.” In like manner Hosea speaks of Israel as an “empty vine” only bringing “forth fruit unto himself,” but nothing for God (Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21; Hos. 10:1).

Through years of long-suffering patience, God had, in various ways, tested Israel seeking for fruit, but found only wild grapes. The last and greatest test was the presence of the beloved Son. The deliberate rejection of the Son was the final proof that Israel was indeed a “degenerate plant” and an “empty vine.”

Thus the moment has come to disclose to the disciples that Israel is set aside, and, if they are to bear fruit for God, it will be no longer as connected with Israel—the degenerate vine, but with Christ, the true Vine. Christ and His disciples will take the place of Jerusalem and her children.

However, while the discourse of the Lord introduces us to that which takes the place of Israel on the earth, it hardly presents Christianity in its heavenly relations. It does not contemplate relationship with Christ in heaven as members of His body by the Holy Spirit—a vital relationship which cannot be broken; but relationship with Christ on earth by the profession of discipleship. This profession may be real or it may be mere profession, hence the Lord speaks of two kinds of branches, those that have life and prove their vitality by bringing forth fruit, and those that have no life and are cast forth and burned.

How fitting then that the vine, of all plants, should be used as a figure, seeing that “fruit” is the great theme of the discourse as being the evidence of true discipleship. Other trees may be useful apart from their fruit; with the vine it is not so. Ezekiel, speaking of the vine, asks, “Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?” (Ezek. 15:3). If the vine produces no fruit it is useless.

What then is the spiritual significance of fruit? May we not say that fruit is the expression of Christ in the believer? We read in Galatians 5:22, 23, that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control.” What is this, however, but a beautiful description of Christ as He passed through this world in humiliation? Hence if such fruit is seen in believers, it will result in the reproduction of Christ in His people. Christ personally has gone from this scene, but it is God’s intention that Christ

characteristically should still be seen in those that are Christ's. Christ in Person has gone to the Father's house, Christ in character is continued in His people on earth.

Fruit is not exactly the exercise of gift, nor service, nor work. We are indeed exhorted "to walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work" (Col. 1:10. N.Tn.). This passage, while showing how closely fruit-bearing is linked with good works, yet clearly distinguishes between them. The good works are to be done in such a Christlike manner that in the works that benefit man, there will be found fruit acceptable to God. The natural man can do very many good works, but in such works there will be found no fruit for God. Does not the Apostle, in 1 Corinthians 13 warn us that we may be active in service and good works, and yet lack "love," the most excellent expression of fruit?

If service and work were fruit it would largely be limited to those who possess gift and ability; but if fruit is the character of Christ then indeed it becomes a possibility, as well as a privilege, for every believer, from the oldest to the youngest, to bear fruit.

Who that loves Christ, and admires the perfections of the One who is altogether lovely, would not desire to exhibit, in some measure, His graces, and thus bring forth fruit? If this is the desire of the heart there are three ways indicated by the Lord, to help us in the fulfillment of our desire.

In order to help us to bring forth fruit there is first the gracious dealings of the Father; then the practical cleansing by the power of Christ's word; and lastly the responsibility of the believer to abide in Christ.

The Father's dealings are represented by the methods of the husbandman. First there is the sad possibility that some branches, though having a living link with the vine, may bring forth no fruit. Such the Father taketh away. Very different are such branches to the withered branches of verse 6, which are cast forth and burned. Here it is the Father that taketh away, there it is men that cast them forth. Was it not thus with some of the Corinthian saints whose walk was such that the Father would not leave them here to bring reproach upon the name of Christ, so took them home, as we read, "many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:30). Then there is the gracious action of the Father with those who bear fruit, in order that they may bring forth more fruit. Such He purges. The chastening and discipline of the Father is to remove all that hinders the expression of the character of Christ. It may indeed be painful, for, "no chastening at the time seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12: 11). If exercised before the Father as to His dealings with us, we shall not be soured and embittered by adversity, but rather softened and mellowed so that in result the character of Christ is seen in us and we become fruitful.

(V. 3.) Secondly there is the Lord's own gracious dealing with us in order that we may bear fruit. He can say, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." This is the practical separation from everything contrary to Christ produced by His word. At that moment the disciples were clean, for had not their feet been in the hands of the Lord? The water applied by His hands had effectually done its cleansing work. Would we know something of the practical cleansing of the word, then indeed we shall do well to sit at His feet like Mary of old, and hear His word. We all know what it is to go to Him with our confessions, our difficulties, and our exercises, and well it is that He should hear our halting words, but it may be that we seldom get alone with Him, for the sake of being in His company and hearing His word. And yet what can be more cleansing, and more productive of fruit, than sitting at His feet and hearing His word? Mary, who chose this good part brought forth fruit so precious to Christ that He can say, "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matt. 26:13).

(Vv. 4, 5). The third means by which the life of the disciple may be rendered fruitful is found in his own hands. It is summed up by the twice repeated word, "Abide in Me." Abiding in Christ presents our privilege, as well as our responsibility, to constantly walk in dependence upon Christ. As one has said, abiding in Christ is "practical habitual nearness of heart to Him." If we have learned that fruit is the reproduction of the character of Christ, expressed by "love, joy, self-control," we shall realize that such an ideal cannot be reached in our own strength. The realization of the moral excellence of the fruit on the one hand, and our own exceeding weakness on the other will convince us of the truth of the Lord's words, "Without Me ye can do nothing." His fruit may indeed be sweet to our taste, but it is only as we abide under His shadow that we shall partake of His fruit. Without the light and warmth of the sun, the natural vine could not bear fruit, and unless we abide in the light and love of the presence of Christ, we too shall be fruitless. If we abide in Christ then indeed Christ will be in us, and if Christ is in us we shall exhibit the lovely character of Christ.

Thus it becomes clear that fruit is not produced by making fruit an object, or by thinking of fruit; it is the outcome of having Christ as an object, of thinking of Him. Christ precedes fruit.

(V. 6). In verse six we have the solemn case of the dead branch—the mere professor, who takes the name of Christ, but has no vital link with Christ. Such can bring forth no fruit. In the figure used the dead branch does not come under the personal dealing of the Husbandman, but is dealt with by others. So the fruitless, and therefore lifeless, professor is not dealt with by the Father but, under the government of God, is dealt with by the executors of His judgment. And here the branch is not "taken away" but "cast forth," "withered," "cast into the fire," and "burned." Was not Judas a solemn and fearful example of a withered branch. In the case of those to whom the Lord was speaking the link with Himself was vital, for had He not just said "Ye are clean"? For this reason the Lord does not say, "If ye do not abide" but "If a man abideth not in Me." The terms are changed in order to exclude the thought of a true disciple being cast forth and burned.

(V. 7, 8). Having unfolded to us the gracious ways by which the life of the believer is made fruitful, the Lord proceeds to set forth the results that flow from bearing fruit. First, on the part of the disciples, the effect of a heart actively and constantly walking in dependence upon Christ, and thus Christ's own words constantly forming the thoughts and affections, would be to enable such an one to ask and pray according to the mind of the Lord, and so praying, obtain an answer to the requests.

A second great result has reference to the Father. Fruit bearing brings glory to the Father. Christ was ever the perfect expression of the Father, thus in the measure in which we exhibit the character of Christ, we too shall set forth the truth as to the Father, and thus glorify the Father.

Finally, as we bear fruit so shall we become witnesses to Christ Himself. Exhibiting His character it will become manifest to all the world that we are His disciples.

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 14:15-31: The Disciples in Relation With the Holy Spirit

John 14:15-31

HAVING carried the thoughts of the disciples beyond the present into the near future the Lord proceeds to disclose the second great event that would mark the coming days. Not only was the Lord going to the Father, but the Holy Spirit was coming from the Father.

Thus the Lord prepares the disciples for the momentous changes about to take place. The Son will return to the Father to take His place as a Man in the glory; the Holy Spirit will come to take up His abode in believers as a divine Person on earth. These two stupendous events would introduce Christianity and bring the Church into being, sustain the Church on her journey through this world, preserve her from the evil of the world, maintain her in testimony for Christ, and at last present the Church to Christ in glory.

Here, however, the Lord does not disclose the great doctrine of the Church and its formation, nor indeed of the testimony the Church would bear through the Spirit. The time for such unfoldings had hardly come. It is rather the deep spiritual experiences, that believers will enjoy through the coming of the Spirit, that is before the Lord. This was fitting for such a moment. The thought of losing One so dear to them—whose presence they had enjoyed—filled their hearts with sorrow. Hence it is the Lord speaks of the coming of another Comforter, One who would not only remove the sense of loneliness, but lead their hearts into a deeper and more intimate acquaintance with their Master than they had known in the days when He dwelt amongst them on earth. It is these secret experiences enjoyed by the Spirit, that will prepare the disciples to be witnesses for Christ in the power of the Spirit. May we not say that our testimony to Christ is often so feeble because we so little enjoy this personal intimacy with Christ into which the Spirit alone can lead? We attempt to take up service without living in the secret place of communion with the Father and the Son by the Spirit. It is the unfolding of these secret experiences that gives such preciousness to this portion. of the last discourse. It is an inside scene in which the believer is brought into the company of divine Persons in order that in due time he may bear testimony to Christ in the outside world from which Christ has gone.

(V. 15). It is not a little striking the way the Lord introduces the great theme of the coming of the Holy Spirit. He says, "If ye love Me keep My commandments." In the course of the Gospel of John we have heard again and again of the Lord's love to the disciples, now for the first time we hear of the disciples' love to the Lord. The gift of the Spirit is thus connected with a company of people who love and obey the Lord. For such a company the Lord delights to pray to the Father to give the Comforter. Moreover do not these words indicate that the experiences enjoyed in the power of the Spirit can only be known by one who is living a life of love and obedience to the Lord?

In the preceding verses the Lord has spoken of faith and prayer (12-14); now He speaks of love and obedience. Thus we gather the Lord intimates that the deep spiritual experiences into which the Comforter leads are opened to those who are marked by faith which believes in the Lord, dependence which prays in His name, love which cleaves to the Lord, and obedience which delights to keep His commandments. These are the great moral characteristics which prepare the soul to profit by the presence of the Spirit. It is not enough to have the Spirit abiding with us, there must be in heart and life a state suited to the Spirit.

(V. 16). In the commencement of the Gospel the Baptist has told us that the Lord would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Later, in connection with the Lord's visit to Jerusalem, we are plainly told that, under the figure of the living water, He spoke of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive; and moreover that this great gift was not then given because Christ was not yet glorified. Now the time has come when the Lord is about to be glorified, and this becomes the fitting moment for the Lord Himself to disclose to His disciples the great truth of the coming to earth of this divine Person.

Very blessedly, and with perfect suitability to the moment, the Lord speaks of the Holy Spirit as a Comforter. However great and varied the functions of the Spirit, to comfort is one that the disciples specially needed at the moment. There is however a deeper significance in the title "Comforter" that may be easily overlooked, for, in our modern usage of the word it mainly implies one who sympathizes with us in our sorrows; in its primary use it means one that "stands by to strengthen, support, and encourage."¹ Thus in the Comforter the disciples would have One who would stand by them to strengthen them in their weakness, and comfort them in their sorrow.

Moreover the Lord speaks of the Comforter as another Comforter, thus comparing the One who was coming with Himself, for had He not been with them supporting, encouraging and comforting them? Further the Lord not only compares, but contrasts the Comforter with Himself. The Lord had only dwelt with them a few brief years, whereas the Comforter who was coming would abide with them forever. Many an Old Testament Scripture had spoken of the Holy Spirit coming upon certain men and for a time controlling them for some special purpose, but that a divine Person should come to abide forever was something entirely new.

(V. 17). A further contrast between Christ and this coming Person is that while Christ is the Truth, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as the Spirit of truth. In Christ we see the truth set forth objectively. By the Spirit of truth we have wrought in us a true apprehension of all that is set forth in Christ.

In further contrast with the Lord, the Spirit is One whom the world cannot receive or know, because "it seeth Him not." Christ had become incarnate and could be seen of man, and was thus presented to be received of man. The Holy Spirit would not become incarnate, and is not presented as an object that can be seen visibly or known intellectually. To the world He is not a divine Person but, at best, only a poetic and vague influence. To the disciples He will be no mere influence, but a Person who abides with them, in contrast to Christ who was leaving them; and would be in them, in contrast to Christ who was with them but not in them.

(Vv. 18-20). In these verses the Lord passes from speaking of the Person of the Holy Spirit, to unfolding the normal effects of His presence in the believer. The departure of the Lord to be with the Father, and the coming of the Spirit would not mean that they had lost one divine Person and gained another. One has truly said, "The promise is not of a substitution which excludes, but of a means which secures His presence." Thus the Lord can say to His disciples, "I will not leave you orphans: I will come to you." It has been said, "When Christ was here on earth, the Father was not far off, 'I am not alone because the Father is with Me,' and if the Comforter is here, Christ is not far distant."

If the 18th verse tells us that the coming of the Spirit will bring Christ very near to us, the following two verses unfold the response in the believer to the Christ who comes. The Lord expresses these apprehensions of the believer in the three definite statements "Ye see Me," "Ye shall live," and "Ye shall know." The Holy Spirit does not come to speak of Himself, or occupy us with Himself, nor form a cult of the Spirit, but to lead the soul to Christ. In a little while the world would see Christ no more, but when He had passed out of the sight of men, He would, in the power of the Spirit still be the object of faith for the believer. To the world Christ would become only an historical figure of one who had lived a beautiful life and died a martyr's death; to the believer He would be still a living Person, the conscious sense of whose presence they would be able to realize and enjoy by the power of the Spirit. Moreover in seeing Him believers would live. The men of the world live because the world exists with its pleasures, and politics, and social round. When these things fail the life of the worldling ceases to have any interest. The Christian lives because Christ lives, and even as Christ, the object of our life, forever lives, so the believer's life is an eternal life.

Moreover by the Spirit the believer knows that Christ is in the Father, that believers are in Christ and that Christ is in believers. We know that Christ has a supreme place in the Father's affections; that we have a place in the heart of Christ, and that Christ has a place in our hearts. The world can neither "see" nor "live" nor "know." It is blind to the glories of Christ; it is dead in trespasses and sins; it is ignorant of God; but, in the power of the Spirit, there will be a company of people upon earth who "see," and "live," and "know." They have Christ in the glory as the object of their souls; a life that finds its joy and delight in Christ, and the knowledge of the place they have in His heart.

(V. 21-24). Verses 18 to 20 have presented to us the normal effect of the coming of the Spirit. The verses that follow present the spiritual qualifications that would enable the individual believer to enter into, and enjoy, the privileges that are open to us in the power of the Spirit. Though alas there has been a grave departure from these normal conditions, by professing Christendom, it is blessed to see that what should be true of the whole can still be enjoyed by the individual. Thus it is important to notice that at this point the Lord's teaching becomes intensely individual. Hitherto the Lord has used the words "you" and "ye" (18-20); now He changes to the use of such words as "he" and "a man" (21-24);

Love and obedience are the great qualifications for entrance into these deeper experiences. Already the Lord has said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments," now He says, "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he is it that loveth Me." It has been truly said that the former presented love as the spring of obedience. the latter obedience as the proof of love. Every expression of the Father's mind was a commandment to Christ, and in the same way every expression of the mind of Christ is a command to the one that loves Him. The one that loves Christ shall be loved of the Father and of Christ. Such an one would be made conscious in a special way of the love of divine Persons. To, such the Lord would manifest Himself.

At this point Judas (not Iscariot) breaks in with his question, "Lord how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world?" Judas, with Jewish thoughts, and Jewish hopes in his mind, is utterly puzzled by these communications. Not realizing the change that was coming, and still clinging to the idea of a visible kingdom about to be established, he cannot understand how this can be if the Lord does not manifest Himself to the world. His brethren, according to the flesh, had a similar thought when they said "Show Thyself to the world" (John 7:4). And still, through the same ignorance of the calling of the church and the character of the day in which we live, there are many true Christians who, in a variety of ways, still say to the Lord, "Show Thyself to the world." Such would fain make Christ a leader of philanthropic works, and the center of great movements for the betterment of the world. They seek to bring Christ back to the world, not seeing that the Spirit of God has come to lead believers out of the world to Christ in heaven.

At first sight the Lord's answer seems hardly to meet the question put by Judas. The time had not come for the full unfolding of the heavenly character of Christianity. Nevertheless the Lord's answer corrects the wrong thought in the mind of the disciples. Judas was thinking of a visible display before the world, the Lord is speaking of a manifestation to an individual—Judas speaks of the world; the Lord speaks of "a man." The world had rejected the Lord, and the Lord had done with the world as such. Now it would be a question of individuals being drawn out of the world by the attractive power of One to whom their hearts are linked in love and affection. In His answer the Lord enlarges upon this truth. Not only will the one that loves the Lord keep His commandments, as already stated, but such an one will keep the Lord's "words." This is more than His commandments. His commandments express His mind as to the details of our path. His "word," as the following verse tells us, is not simply His own word but the Father's which sent Him, and speaks of all that He came to make known of the Father's heart, and the Father's counsels for heaven and the world to come. His "commandments" throw needed light on our path; His "words" light up the glorious future by revealing the counsels of the Father's heart. To cherish His words, therefore, makes room for the Father; so now the Lord can say, "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

(V. 25, 26). The two opening words of these verses introduce a fresh stage in this part of the Lord's discourse. He has set before us the normal experiences that believers would enjoy by the Spirit (18-20) then the experience open to each individual believer (21-24); now the Lord speaks of the coming of the Holy Spirit more especially in connection with the Eleven. For the first time the Comforter is definitely said to be "the Holy Spirit." He is spoken of as a Divine Person who will be sent by the Father in the name of Christ. Coming in the name of Christ tells us that He comes to represent the interests of Christ during the absence of Christ. He is not here to exalt believers, to make them great in this scene, nor advance their worldly interests. His sole business in a world that has rejected Christ, is to attract to Christ, to gather out a people for Christ, to exalt Christ. In the course of these last communications we shall find that the Spirit takes a threefold way to maintain the interests of Christ. First, in this chapter, by drawing out our affections for Christ: second, in chapter 15 by opening our lips in testimony to Christ: third, in chapter 16, by supporting us in the presence of the opposition of the world, by unfolding to us the Father's counsels for the world to come.

Here the great work of the Spirit is to engage us with Christ Himself. There are two ways in which He awakens our affections for Christ. First the Lord tells the Eleven, "He shall teach you all things." The "all things" of verse 26 are in contrast to "these things" of verse 25. The Lord

had spoken of certain things, but there were things belonging to the glory of Christ, which were beyond the apprehension of the Eleven at that moment. The Lord was limited in His communications by the limited spiritual capacity of the disciples. With the coming of the Spirit there would be an enlarged spiritual comprehension, which would make it possible for the Spirit to communicate “all things” connected with Christ in the glory. Secondly, the Lord can say, the Spirit will bring “all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you.” He will not only reveal the new things concerning Christ in His new place—things that carry us far into eternal glory—but He will recall the gracious communications made by Christ in His sojourn on earth. All that is of Christ, past present and future, is infinitely precious. Nothing that is of Christ shall be lost. How important that those who by their words and writings were going to instruct others, should have the Lord’s words recalled to them by a Divine Person. In reporting these words to us they are not left to their own imperfect, and failing, memories. Their report of His words will have all the absolute perfection of One who recalls them without any admixture of human frailty.

(V. 27-31). With the preceding verses the Lord has closed this gracious ministry that sets His people in relation with Divine Persons. This ministry of comfort and consolation—this communion with Divine Persons—prepares the disciples for the departure of the One they love. Thus it is that in these closing verses the Lord can speak more freely of the coming parting.

If, however, He was going away He would leave His peace with His disciples. In outward circumstances He was the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. On every hand He had to meet the contradiction of sinners, but walking in communion with the Father, and in subjection to the Father’s will, He ever enjoyed peace of heart. This same peace would be the portion of the believer, if enjoying this communion with Divine Persons, and so under the control of the Spirit that the believer’s will is refused. Surrounded by a world of unrest the believer’s heart would be garrisoned by the peace of Christ. It would be a peace shared with Christ, for in giving His disciples peace, He gives not as the world which parts with what it gives.

Moreover if the Lord was going away, it would be but for a time, for He was coming again. In the meantime, unselfish love would rejoice in that His path of suffering was over, and that He was going to the Father. He plainly forewarns them of His departure so that when it took place their faith might not be shaken.

Hereafter He would not talk much with them; for the ruler of this world was coming. This would mean that the last great conflict would be entered, which would annul the power of Satan. The triumph over Satan was assured, for in Christ the devil had nothing. His death would not be the result of Satan’s power, but the outcome of Christ’s love to the Father. His perfect obedience to the Father’s commandment, even obeying unto death, is the everlasting proof of His love to the Father.

With these words, that breathe of His love and obedience to the Father, the Lord brings this portion of His discourses to an end by saying, “Arise let us go hence.” In love to the Father the Lord goes hence to do the Father’s bidding, but He associates His disciples with Himself. There will come a time when, as the Lord has already said, “Whither I go ye cannot follow Me now,” but there are a few more steps they can take with Him, even though on their part they be halting steps. Thus together they pass from the upper room into the outer world.

The New Promise.

“He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him” —John 14:21.

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 14:14-14: The Disciples in Relation With the Father

John 14:4-14

THE Lord has set before us the end of the journey, now He will lead us into our privileges while on the way. in the verses that follow we are set in relationship with the Father. We have not yet reached the Father’s house but it is our privilege to know the Father—the One to whom the house belongs—before we enter there. And if we are brought to a present knowledge of the Father it is in order that we may have access to the Father while passing through the world. The great purpose of this part of the discourse is that we may “know,” “see,” and “come” to the Father, and, coming to the Father, we might, in all the happy confidence of children, make known our requests in the name of Christ.

(Vv. 5, 6). The Lord introduces this great theme with the word, “Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.” Thomas, with a very different thought in his mind, fails to catch the meaning of the Lord’s words. In reply to the question of Thomas “How can we know the way?” the Lord plainly shows that He is speaking of the Person to whom He is going and not simply of a place as Thomas wrongly supposed. To this Person—the Father—Christ is the way; the One, too, in whom the truth of the Father is set forth. Moreover He is the life in which the truth of the Father can be enjoyed. There is moreover no other way to the Father, hence the Lord adds, “No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” Words of deeply solemn significance in a day when men reject the claims of the Son while talking of the Fatherhood of God. The words of the Lord anticipate the inspired words of the Apostle who, at a later time, will write, “Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father” (1 John 2:23).

(V. 7). It is however equally true that to know the Son is to know the Father. Thus the Lord can say to His disciples, “If ye had known Me ye would have known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him and have seen Him.”

(Vv. 8-11). Philip, like Thomas, cannot rise above that which is material. Thomas had thought of a material place: Philip thinks of physical sight, and therefore says, “Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us.” The Lord in His reply clearly shows that He is speaking of the vision of faith. He asks a searching question, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?” Then the Lord states, “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.” To look beyond the outward form and see the Son by faith, is indeed to see the Father; for the Son is the perfect revelation of the Father.

The unbelieving world did not see the Son; all they saw was the reputed son of Joseph—the Carpenter. Only faith could see, in that lowly Man, the Only Begotten Son who came to declare the Father. The One who dwelt in the bosom of the Father could alone declare the heart of the Father. Abraham could tell us that God is Almighty; Moses could tell us that God is the I AM—eternal and unchanging. But neither Abraham nor Moses were great enough to declare to us the heart of the Father. None but a divine Person is great enough to reveal a divine Person. Thus it is that the Lord immediately declares the perfect equality and identity of the Father and the Son, for He can say, “I am in the Father and the Father in Me.” The passage of the Son through this world is not simply a history of the Father and the Son, but rather of the Father in the Son.

Once we have seen by faith the glory of the Son, it becomes simple to see the Father revealed in the Son. Because of who He is, as equal and identified with the Father, the Lord can at once bring forward His “words” and His works as the revelation of the Father. The grace, the love, the wisdom, and the power that shone in His words and works declare to us the heart of the Father.

(Vv. 12-14). Yet further, if on earth the Son had glorified the Father, in making known His heart through His words, still more would the Father be glorified by the Son when, taking His place on high, He would, through the “greater works” of the disciples, still declare the Father’s heart; and further would glorify the Father in answering requests made to the Father in the name of Christ.

At this point in the discourse the Lord ceases to speak of the experiences of His words and works which the disciples had enjoyed while He was yet with them, and passes on to speak of the new and deeper experiences of His power after His departure to the Father. The change in the discourse is marked by the words, “Verily, verily” —words generally used to introduce some fresh truth. Thus the Lord reveals to His amazed disciples the new truth that after His departure the believer in Jesus would do the works that Jesus had done in person, and, more surprising still, would do greater works.

The Lord connects this greater display of power with His going to the Father. In returning to the Father He was going to the source of all power and blessing. Thus by His presence with the Father the full resources of heaven would be opened to the one on earth who believes in Christ and prays in His name.

These transitional verses carry us into the history of the early Church, when, instead of only a few disciples being gathered under the ministry of Jesus, thousands were gathered through the preaching of the Apostles, and “many signs and wonders” were “wrought among the people,” and the very “shadow of Peter passing by” carried healing to the sick; when the dead were raised, and “God wrought special miracles by the hand of Paul,” so that handkerchiefs from his body healed those upon whom they were placed.

This mighty power was available for faith expressing itself through prayer in His name. It has been truly said, “Requests made in the name of another are understood to imply the appropriation to one’s self of his claims, his merits, his rights to be heard.” The Lord, by His own words, gives this privilege to those who are in relationship with Himself by faith. It was something new to the disciples to ask in the name of Christ, and, as all else in these discourses, is the outcome of the Lord’s departure, for asking in His name supposes the absence of Christ. The phrase to “ask in My name” occurs five times in these discourses.

Thus in the words and works of Jesus on earth we learn the Father’s heart; and we still learn the Father through the “greater works” done by the disciples under the direction of the Lord from His place on high: and we learn the Father’s love as we find the Lord acting for us in response to our requests to the Father in the name of Christ.

In a world gone far from God, where all sought their own, He was ever one with the Father in mind and purpose and affection, and found His delight in the Father’s will. Though a world of sin made Him the Man of sorrows yet He found unbroken rest, and constant joy in the Father’s love. Into this same blessed relationship with the Father He would bring us that we too may find our delight, our rest, our joy in the Father’s love.

All has been revealed in the Son. The love of the Father’s heart, the purpose of the Father’s mind, the grace of the Father’s hand, all has been set forth in Christ the Son. All too has been revealed as our present portion. We shall have no different revelation of the Father when we get to heaven than we have now. All has been revealed on earth. The only difference being, now we see through a glass darkly, then face to face. But what we shall fully enjoy in heaven has been fully revealed on earth. We wait to have the glory of the Father’s house disclosed to our wondering eyes, but the love of the Father’s heart has been revealed, for the joy of our hearts, on earth, though, alas, our feeble faith may have but little responded to the revelation.

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 14:1-3: The Disciples in Relation With Christ

John 14:1-3

THE discourse (V. 1) opens with the tender and touching words “Let not your heart be troubled.” Who but the Lord could have uttered such gracious words at such a solemn moment. The Lord had just foretold the thrice repeated denial of Peter, and just as the premonition of the denial is preceded by that gracious word, “Thou shalt follow Me afterward,” so it is followed by these touching words, “Let not your heart be troubled.” With the treachery of Judas and the denial of Peter before them, the disciples might well be troubled. Yet, says the Lord, “Let not your heart be troubled.”

In this early part of the discourse the Lord takes a threefold way to relieve our hearts of trouble. First, He sets Himself before us as the object of faith in the glory. “Ye believe in God” —One whom we have never seen—and now, as the Lord passes out of sight into glory, He can say, “Believe also in Me.” Thus Christ, as a Man in the glory, becomes the resource and stay of the heart. Everything on earth may fail us, the world tempt us, the flesh betray us, yet Christ in the glory remains the unfailing resource of faith. As one has said, “There is no solid comfort to be found outside of Christ.” Christian friends however true, relatives however loving, circumstances however favorable, health however

good, prospects however pleasing—yea all on earth—will fail to give lasting comfort; but Christ in the glory remains the One to whom faith can turn and find in Him the unfailing resource of His people, throughout the long dark night of His absence.

(V. 2). Second, for the comfort of our hearts the Lord discloses to us the new home, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." Not only have we Christ in the glory our unfailing resource, but we have the Father's house as our abiding home. For let us note that the word "mansions" is really "abodes" —a home which once it is reached will never more be left—there we shall abide. On earth we have "no continuing city." We are pilgrims and strangers here. Our abiding home is in the Father's house. Moreover in the Father's house there are "many" abodes. On earth there was no room for Christ, and little room for those who are Christ's, but in the Father's house there is room for all that are Christ's—the great and the small. If it were not so He would have told His disciples. He would not have gathered His disciples around Himself, and led them outside this world, were He not leading them into a scene of blessedness well known to Him as the Father's house. To this home the Lord was going. On the cross He prepared His people for the place; His presence in the glory prepares the place for His people. Thus we are lifted above the weakness and failure of all things earthly, carried beyond the changing scenes of time, to enter in spirit a better world, there to find a home prepared in the Father's house.

(V. 3.) Third, for the comfort of our hearts, the Lord sets before us His coming again to receive us into the home. In due time other Scriptures will disclose to us the order of events in connection with His coming, but here, for our comfort, we learn the supreme joy of His coming. His coming will indeed close our wilderness journey. It will heal all the breaches among the people of God; it will gather together the divided and scattered saints. It will end the sorrows, the trials, and the labors of His people. It will take us out of a scene of darkness and death and usher us into a home of light and life and love. All this it will do and more, but, above all else, it will bring us into the company of Jesus. As He can say, "I will receive you unto Myself that where I am there ye may be also." What would heaven be without Jesus? To be in a scene where there will be "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying" —where all is holiness and perfection—will be blessed indeed, but if Jesus were not there the heart would still remain unsatisfied. The supreme happiness of His coming is that we shall be with Him. He has been with us in this dark world of death, and we shall be with Him in life's eternal home—the Father's house.

This, the highest aspect of His coming, discloses to us the secret longings of His heart. We learn, in these words of the Lord, the deep desire of His heart to have His people with Himself for the joy and satisfaction of His own heart. He wants our company. He is the object of our faith in heaven, we are the objects of His love on earth. If our treasure is in heaven, His treasure is on earth. Christ Himself has gone, but the heart of Christ is down here and, as one has truly said, "If His heart is here, He Himself is not far off."

What comfort for troubled hearts fills these opening verses! Christ in the glory our unfailing resource; a home in the glory that awaits us; and a Man in the glory that wants us.

How blessed too is the manner of the Lord's instruction, and how different to the way of mere men. In a little He will enlighten us as to the journey through this world and warn us as to trials and persecution, but first and foremost He discloses to us the glorious end of the journey. Such lofty themes we should have reserved for the close of the discourse. He takes a better and more perfect way. He will not let us face the journey through a hostile world until He has assured our hearts of the abiding home with Him in the Father's house. He would have us face the journey in the light of the home to which it leads. It has been remarked, "The passage through the valley is changed, when once we have caught sight of the hills beyond."

For our comfort, too, these transcendent revelations of the unseen world are set before us in simple and homely words. Truths so great that they may well stagger the highest intellect are conveyed in words so simple that they are within the grasp of a little child that believes in Jesus.

The Lord Is My Shepherd and Other Papers, Upper Room, The

The first occasion on which John is called "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is in the Upper Room, as described in John 13. What a scene it is for the heart to contemplate! Jesus is there with a love that can never break down, for "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." John is there delighting himself in the love of Christ, resting his head on the bosom of Jesus, and describing himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Peter is there with real and ardent love for the Lord, but trusting in his own love to the Lord rather than resting in the Lord's love to him. Lastly, Judas is there, with no love to the Lord – with the bag at his side and the devil in his heart, ready to betray the Lord and pass into the long dark night.

In Jesus we see how very near His love has brought Him to men like ourselves, inasmuch as John can rest his head on the bosom of the One who dwelt in the bosom of the Father. In John we see what the heart of the Saviour can do for a sinner, bringing him to perfect rest in perfect love. In Judas we see what the heart of the sinner can do with the Saviour – betray Him, with every profession of love, for thirty pieces of silver.

The feet-washing is over and the time has come for the Lord to utter His farewell words; but for the moment His spirit is troubled by the presence of the betrayer. The Lord unburdens His heart to His disciples, saying, "One of you shall betray Me." Immediately the disciples look one on another, doubting of whom He spake. Looking one on another will never solve difficulties that arise amongst believers. We must look to the Lord, but looking to the Lord demands nearness to the Lord, and in the circle of the Upper Room, the disciple who was nearest to the Lord, was the one whose feet had been in the hands of the Lord, whose head was resting on the bosom of the Lord, and whose heart was delighting in the love of the Lord, who can describe himself as "one of His disciples whom Jesus loved." Peter, the man who was trusting in his love to the Lord, was not near enough to the Lord to learn His mind; he must needs beckon to John.

Thus we learn that nearness to the Lord and intimacy with the Lord, is the happy portion of the one who is resting upon the Lord's love.

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, Thoughts on Feet-Washing

Jesus rose “from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded” (John 13:25).

The necessity for feet-washing is because the disciples will be left in a world where the devil and the flesh combine in deadly hostility to Christ. The flesh, whether in sinner or saint, is the material which the devil ever uses.

When the Lord comes to Peter, he boldly says, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.” In patient grace, the Lord corrects Peter’s impulsiveness by saying, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me.” From this we learn that feet-washing symbolizes the present service of the Lord whereby He removes from our spirits everything that would hinder part with Him. Thus, too, we learn that feet-washing enables believers on earth to hold communion with Christ in heaven.

When the affections have been chilled, even though there may be nothing to disturb the conscience, there will be a grave hindrance to communion with Christ. At such times the service of feet-washing comes in to remove the hindrance.

In Scripture we find that water is often used as a symbol of the cleansing effect of the Word of God. At conversion the Word is applied by the power of the Spirit, producing a thorough change and imparting a new nature. This entirely alters the thoughts, words and actions of the believer. This change is signified by the Lord’s words, “He that is washed all over needs not to wash save his feet, but is wholly clean” (John 13:10 JND).

There can be no repetition of this great change. Yet those washed all over may often grow dull of spirit. As the travelers’ feet are soiled and wearied by the dust of the road, so the believer, in contact with the daily round, the duties of the home-life and the pressures of business life, as well as the continual conflict with evil, may often be wearied in spirit. Thus, he is hindered from having communion with Christ in His things.

It is not that the believer has done anything that conscience would take account of, calling for confession and the work of the Advocate. Rather, his spirit is wearied and needs to be refreshed. Such refreshment Christ loves to give, if we will but put our feet in His blessed hands. He will refresh our souls by presenting Himself before us, in all His perfections, through the Word.

Thus, too, we are given the privilege of washing one another’s feet—a blessed service, not carried out by seeking to find fault with one another, but by ministering Christ to each other. Only the ministry of Christ will bring refreshment to a weary soul.

The godly widow in 1 Timothy 5:10 was not a rebuker of evil nor a corrector of faults, but rather a refresher of drooping spirits by ministering Christ.

H. Smith (adapted)

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 13:31-38: God Glorified in Christ

John 13:31-38

WITH the passing of Judas the dark shadow, that rested upon the little company, was lifted. The troubled spirit of the Lord was relieved, and the questionings of the disciples were stilled. The words, “When he was gone out” mark this change. Judas had left the light of the Upper Room and passed into the darkness of the outer world. The light inside shines the brighter in his absence, even as the darkness outside is deepened by his presence. The door which closed on the traitor, severed the last link between Christ and the world. The atmosphere is cleared, and, alone with His disciples, the Lord is free to unfold the secrets of His heart.

(Vv. 31, 32). The Lord is departing to be with the Father, His own will be left behind as witnesses for Christ in a world from which He has been rejected. In the course of these last discourses the disciples will be put in touch with Heaven (14); they will be instructed how to bear fruit on earth (15); and they will be strengthened to withstand persecution from the world (16). Such high privileges and honors require a preliminary work on the part of Christ as well as preparation amongst His own. Thus this opening discourse presents God glorified in Christ on earth, Christ glorified as a Man in heaven, and the saints left on earth to glorify Christ. These great truths prepare the way for all subsequent revelations.

All blessing for man, for heaven and earth, throughout eternal ages, rests upon the great foundation truths that come before us in the opening of this discourse. The Lord presents Himself as the Son of Man, and in connection with this title, proclaims three truths of vital importance:

First, “Now is the Son of Man glorified,”

Second, “God is glorified in Him,”

Third, “God shall glorify Him in Himself.”

We may well linger over these great truths seeking to learn something of their deep meaning; for faith’s apprehension of these truths forms the solid basis in the soul for all spiritual growth and blessing.

The first great truth is, "Now is the Son of Man glorified." This brings before us the infinite perfection of the Son of Man—the Saviour. The reference is to the suffering of the Son of Man at the Cross. The statement is that in those sufferings the Son of Man is glorified. To be glorified is to have all the qualities that exalt a person brought into display. At the Cross all the infinite perfections of the Son of Man were displayed in the highest degree.

In the eleventh of John we read that the sickness of Lazarus was "for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

There the glory of the Son of God was displayed in raising a man from the dead. Here the glory of the Son of Man is seen in going into death. Power over death displays the glory of the Son of God, submission to death the glory of the Son of Man.

Already the Lord had said, in answer to the Gentiles' desire to see Jesus, "The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified." There however the Lord was anticipating the glories of the Kingdom; here He speaks of the deeper glories of the Cross. In the future, as Son of Man, He will receive dominion and glory and an everlasting kingdom; and in that bright day the whole earth will be filled with His glory (Dan. 7:13, 14; Psa. 72:19). Even so, the excellent glories of the coming Kingdom will not exceed, and cannot equal, His far deeper glories as the Son of Man upon the Cross. The glory of His earthly throne is exceeded by the glory of His shameful Cross. The Kingdom will display His official glories, the Cross witnesses, to His moral glories. In the day of His reign all dominions shall serve and obey Him and all will be put in subjection under Him as the Son of Man. In the day of His sufferings, He Himself was the obedient and subject Man. Truly every step of His path witnessed to His moral glories, for they could not be hid; but at the Cross these glories shone in their full luster. The One who learned obedience in every step of the way was at last tested by death and found "obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." The perfect subjection to His Father's will that marked His path, has its brightest display amidst the approaching shadows of the Cross when He can say, "Not My will but Thine be done." Every step bore testimony to His perfect love to the Father, but the supreme witness of His love is seen when, in view of the Cross He can say, "That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me Commandment, even so I do." His holy nature that was undefiled, and undefilable, by the sinful world He passed through, is seen in its perfection when in anticipation of the agony of being made sin, He can say, "If it be possible let this cup pass from Me."

Truly at the Cross His moral glories—His obedience, His subjection, His love, His holiness, and every other perfection, have their brightest display. There the Lord's words were made good, "Now is the Son of Man glorified."

Thus the first great statement assures us of the infinite perfection of the Son of Man—of our Saviour—the One who as the great propitiatory sacrifice has glorified God. Moreover as we seize the import of this statement, telling us of the perfection of Jesus, we see how worthy He is of our full confiding trust. In the presence of such perfection no one can say that there was any imperfection in Him, which makes it impossible to trust Him, His perfections, brought fully into display, reveal Him to be the One who is altogether lovely, possessing every beautiful trait that renders Him worthy of our trust.

Gazing upon the Son of Man at the Cross, seeing Him glorified by all His infinite perfections being brought into display, prepares us for the second great statement, "God is glorified in Him." All others had dishonored God, but at last One is found—the Son of Man, Himself morally perfect, who is able to undertake a work which glorifies God. But to glorify God He must be made sin, and go into the place of death. "The heavens declare the glory of God" as Creator, with infinite wisdom and power, but cannot declare the glory of His moral Being. For this the Son of Man must suffer, that by those sufferings every attribute of God may receive its highest expression. By the Cross the majesty of God is vindicated, the truth of God maintained, the righteousness of God is seen in the judgment of sin. The holiness that demanded such a sacrifice, and the love that gave it, shine in their brightest luster. Truly the Son of Man, by His sufferings, has glorified God.

This great work leads to the truth of the third great statement, "If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him." If God has been glorified in Christ, God will give an everlasting proof of His satisfaction with what Christ has done. Christ glorified as a Man in the glory, is the only adequate answer to His work on the Cross, and is the eternal proof of God's satisfaction with that work.

In the first statement, "Now is the Son of Man glorified," we learn the perfection of the Son of Man. In the second statement, "God is glorified in Him," we learn the perfection of His work. In the third statement, "God shall glorify Him in Himself," we learn God's perfect satisfaction with that work. We have a perfect Saviour who has done a perfect work to God's perfect satisfaction. Other Scriptures will tell us that this perfect Saviour, this perfect work, and God's perfect satisfaction are available for all, for we read, "He gave Himself a ransom for all." And God's perfect satisfaction in Christ and His work, enables God to say, "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."

(V. 33). The glorification of the Son of Man will involve separation from the disciples. The Lord, with His perfect sympathy, enters into the sorrow that fills the disciples' hearts at the thought of being parted from the One they had learned to love. Again and again, with touches of human tenderness He will refer to the inevitable parting, and prepare their hearts for the coming break in the earthly companionship (cf. 14:4, 28, 29; 16:4-7, 16, 28).

Never before had the Lord addressed the disciples as "little children." It is a term, in the original language, expressive of compassionate endearment. Thus, with tender solicitude, He broaches the subject of the coming parting. Yet a little while He would be with them. The Lord was going back to glory traveling by a road that none could follow. Afterward believers may follow, even by a martyr's death, but not death in the way the Lord would have to meet it—as the penalty of sin. That was a path of which the Lord could say, "Whither I go, ye cannot come."

(Vv. 34, 35). Moreover the coming parting would mean that the disciples would be left without the powerful bond of the personal presence of the One they all loved. Hence the Lord gives a new commandment, "That ye love one another; as I have loved you." It has been suggested that the Lord speaks of this command as a new command, in contrast to the old command, well known to these Jewish disciples, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The new commandment is, "That ye love one another as I have loved you." Christ loved with a love which, while never indifferent to evil, yet triumphed over all the power of evil. If we love one another after the pattern of Christ's great love, we shall not suffer evil in one another, but we shall find a way of dealing with the evil without ceasing to love one another. Nothing but the bond of love, after the divine pattern, will hold together a company of people each having a distinct personality, with different shades of character, and diverse temperaments.

Moreover a company marked by love would be so passing strange in a scene governed by lust and selfishness, that the very world would realize that such must be the disciples of Christ. The world cannot appreciate the faith and hope of the Christian circle, but divine love and its effects they can at least see and admire, if they cannot imitate. Thus a company marked by love to one another, after the pattern of Christ, would become a witness to Christ in the world from which He is absent, so that Christ, if glorified with the Father in heaven, would be glorified in the saints on earth.

(Vv. 36-38). The closing scene while occupied with Peter, carries a warning to the whole company. If the disciples are left behind to glorify Christ, let them not forget that each one has the flesh within that is ready to deny Christ. Simon Peter, apparently heedless of the new command, and thinking only of the coming parting, asks, with seeming resistance to that which he does not understand, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" The Lord answers, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterward." The Lord was going to suffer death as the Martyr at the hands of wicked men: but, far more terrible to His holy soul, He was going into death as the holy Victim under the hand of God. This, indeed, was a path that He alone could take; Peter could not follow in that path. Afterward, in the years to come, Peter will have the high honor to follow the Lord in the path of martyrdom.

Trusting in his love to the Lord, Peter self-confidently asserts "I will lay down my life for Thy sake," only to hear the Lord's solemn warning, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice."

If the flesh in a false disciple can betray the Lord, the flesh in a true one can deny the Lord. Yet let us not forget that the Lord's love triumphed over Peter's denial, for, as we have seen, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Deceived by our self-confidence we may even deny the Lord, yet we are loved by the Lord with a love that will not let us go.

The New Command.

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" —John 13:34.

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, Departure of the Betrayer, The: John 13:18-30

John 13:18-30

To receive spiritual communications ever calls for a spiritual condition. Hence feet-washing was a needed preparation for those who were about to listen to the Lord's last words, so rich with divine truth and spiritual comfort. There was one present, however, who had never been washed all over, on whom feet-washing would have no effect, and to whom the teaching of Jesus would have no meaning. The presence of Judas, plotting in his heart the coming betrayal, cast a dark shadow over the little company. Ere the last instructions can be communicated by the Lord, or received by the disciples, Judas must pass from the upper room into the night.

(Vv. 18-20). The way of his removal shows the tender solicitude of the Lord for His own. The treachery of Judas, long known to the Lord is very gently disclosed to His disciples. In the course of the feet-washing the Lord had made allusion to Judas, unnoticed, apparently, by the Eleven. Now He speaks more plainly, saying, "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen." There was an inner circle of the Lord's chosen companions to whom He was about to disclose the secrets of His heart. But there was one present who had no part in that chosen circle; one of whom the Scripture had said, "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me."

This disclosure might well be a shock to the disciples and a test to their faith. Reasoning unbelief might have argued, "We knew not of the presence of the traitor, but if Jesus knew not, can He indeed be the Lord of glory?" The Lord disposes of such possible reasonings, and supports their faith, by revealing beforehand the coming betrayal. He says, "I will tell you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am." They shall, through the betrayal of Judas, have fresh evidence that He is indeed the great I AM to whom all is known, and to whom the future is present.

On the one hand, the presence and treachery of the betrayer shall not be allowed to cast a slur upon the glory of the Lord; on the other hand, the utter break down of one numbered amongst the twelve shall not invalidate the commission of the remaining Eleven. That commission would remain in all its force, and thus the Lord can say, "He that receiveth whosoever I send receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me, receiveth Him that sent Me." In the presence of the awful sin of Judas the glory of the Lord is undimmed, and the commission of the Eleven untouched.

(Vv. 21, 22). More, however, is needed to bring home to the disciples the terrible reality of this disclosure, and to remove Judas from their midst. The Lord will tell them plainly the nature of the sin, and finally reveal the man who will commit it. These further disclosures deeply moved the spirit of the Lord. "He was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray ME." Thus the disciples learn in language that none can mistake, that one of their number is about to betray the Lord. They must face the terrible fact, that the very occasion that a hostile world was seeking—and could not find for fear of the people—would arise from their midst in the person of one who feared neither God nor the people—one who had passed as a disciple of the Lord, had been His daily companion, seen all His works of power, and listened, unmoved, to His words of grace and love.

Such a disclosure troubled the spirit of the Lord and raised the anxious questionings of the disciples as they looked one on another, doubting of whom He spake.

(V. 23). Looking on one another will not solve this solemn question. The traitor is present, knowing that he is discovered by the Lord, though betraying no sign that would expose him to others. To the Lord they must turn to find relief from this terrible suspense. The disciple who inquires of the Lord must be one who is near to the Lord. He who is nearest is one who can describe himself as "one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved." Conscious of the Lord's love to him, and confiding in that love, John is found leaning on the bosom of Jesus. The man whose feet,

a little before, had been in the hands of Jesus, now reclines with his head on the bosom of Jesus. May we not say this position of intimate communion is the proper outcome of feet-washing. The head resting on that bosom of love, follows the feet-washing by those hands of love.

(Vv. 24, 25). Simon Peter, the warm-hearted disciple who, so often and in so many ways, seems to say, "I am the disciple that loves the Lord," was hardly near enough to inquire of the Lord. He beckons to John to ask "Who it should be?" Quite simply John asks, "Lord, who is it?"

(V. 26). At once the Lord replies, "He it is to whom I shall give the sop, when I have dipped it." Others have pointed out that the force of the Lord's words is somewhat obscured by the Authorized Version. It is not "a sop" as if it were a mere casual act; but "the sop," referring to a definite custom to give to a favored guest the specially prepared morsel of the feast. The Lord follows His words by giving the sop to Judas Iscariot, and thus, not only the betrayal is foretold, but the betrayer is exposed.

(V. 27). Already lust had opened the heart of Judas to the devil's suggestion, now Satan himself takes possession of Judas. If there was any stirring of conscience left in Judas, any sense of shame, any shrinking from the sin he was about to commit, all is silenced with the entrance of Satan. With Satan there is no hesitation, and henceforth Judas becomes the helpless instrument of his designs. For Judas there is now no turning back, and thus the Lord can say to him, "That thou doest do quickly."

(Vv. 28-30). The Eleven, stunned, as it seems, by this terrible disclosure, fail to grasp the meaning of the Lord's words. Judas having been entrusted with the bag, they judge the Lord's words must have some reference to meeting the needs of the feast or to relieving the poor. Judas has no misapprehension. The presence of the Lord has become intolerable to this devil-possessed man, so having received the sop he immediately arises and, without a word, passes into the night, only a little later to pass into a deeper night—that horror of great darkness—from whence there is no return.

It has been remarked that in all this solemn scene there is no denunciation of Judas, no reproach is heaped upon him, no word of expulsion is uttered against him, no demand, to depart is given to him. The presence of a false one is revealed; the sin he is about to commit is foretold, the man who will commit it is indicated, and then, amidst a silence more terrible than words, he leaves the light that was too searching, the holy Presence that he no longer could endure, and passes into the night for which no morning will ever dawn. Let us remember that but for the grace of God, and the precious blood of Christ, we should each one follow Judas into the night.

The Last Words: Exposition of John 13-17, John 13:2-17: The Feet-Washing

John 13:2-17

No longer could the Lord be the companion of His disciples in their pilgrimage on earth, yet He will not cease to be their servant in His new place in heaven. Thus, in the scene that follows, described in verses 2 to 17, we have an act of grace which, while closing the Lord's service of love for His own on earth, foreshadows His coming service for His own when He takes His new place in glory. If He can no longer have part with us personally in the path of humiliation, He will make it possible for us to have part with Him in His place of glory. This, we judge, is the import of this gracious act of feet-washing. Throughout His perfect life the mind in Christ Jesus was ever to forget self in the service of love for others: and in this last act, though conscious of the dark shadow of the cross, the Lord is still forgetting self in order to serve His own.

Verses 2 and 3 introduce this lowly service by showing, on the one hand, its deep necessity, and on the other hand, the Lord's perfect ability for the service.

The necessity of feet-washing is made manifest in that the disciples will be left in a world in which the devil and the flesh combine in deadly hostility to Christ. The reference to the betrayal of Judas in this opening scene, as also to the denial of Peter a little later, shows clearly that the flesh, whether in sinner or saint, is only material for the devil to use. The unjudged indulgence of the flesh had opened the heart of Judas to the devil's suggestions. To betray one's friend, and that too by the token of love, is repulsive even to the natural man; but the overpowering desire to gratify lust, prepares the heart to entertain a suggestion that is foreign to nature, and could only come from the devil.

In the presence of this fearful display of the power of the flesh and the devil, the prospect of being left in an evil world, with the flesh within and the devil without, may well appall the heart of the disciples. At once however our hearts are sustained by being directed from the flesh and the devil to Christ and the Father, to learn that "the Father hath given all things" into the hands of Christ. Great power is in the hands of the devil who hates us; but "all power" is in the hands of Christ who loves us. Nor is it only that "all power" had been given to Christ, but He was going to the place of power—He came from God and was going to God.

While feeling with His perfect sensibilities the treachery of a false disciple, and the coming denial of a true one, He, nevertheless, moved on in the calm consciousness that all power was in His hands, and that He was going to the place of power. In like manner He would have us to pass through a world of evil in the consciousness that He has all power and is in the place to exercise the power. Moreover, not only is the Lord in the place of power, with all power, but, in the scene that follows, He will let us know that He delights to use the power on our behalf. The One who has all power in His hands is the One who has all love in His heart. Thus it comes to pass that, moved by a heart of love, the One who has all power in His hands will take into those very hands the soiled feet of His way-worn disciples. The One who is Lord of all becomes the servant of all.

(Vv. 4, 5). To perform this gracious service "He riseth from supper." He rises from the Passover supper, which speaks of His association with us in Kingdom glories (Luke 22:15, 16) to do that which leads to our communion with Him in heavenly glories. In the perfection of His grace He girds Himself for this last act of service, and, pouring the water into a basin, began to wash the disciples' feet and wipe them with a towel wherewith He was girded.

(Vv. 6, 7). "Then cometh He to Simon Peter." If others accept the Lord's service in wondering silence, Peter, impelled by his forceful character, utters all his thoughts. Three times he speaks, each time exposing his ignorance of the Lord's mind. His first utterance deprecates the Lord's lowly service: the second utterance declines it absolutely: the last utterance impulsively submits to the service, but, in a way that would rob it of all its deep significance. Yet, as one has said, "If we are admonished by the mistakes of the disciples much more we are instructed by the answers which correct them." In the Lord's answer we learn the deep spiritual meaning of this last act of service.

To Peter it was incomprehensible that the Lord of glory should stoop to wash those wayward feet. Hence his first utterance is one of protest mingled with surprise—"Lord dost Thou wash my feet? The Lord answers, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." Thus we learn that, at the moment, it was not possible for the disciples to discern the spiritual significance of the Lord's act. Hereafter, when the Spirit has come, all will be made plain. Clearly then we learn that this service was not, as is often said, to teach a lesson in humility by an act of supreme humility on the part of the Lord. There would be no need for Peter to wait for a further day to discern the humility of the act. His very utterances show that the humility of the Lord was uppermost in his thoughts at that moment.

(V. 8). Undeterred by the Lord's answer, which should have warned Peter to be silent until the hereafter of full enlightenment, he now boldly says "Thou shalt never wash my feet." The Lord, in His patient grace, passing over the slight, corrects Peter's impulsiveness by saying, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." Brief as the answer is, we can see, now that the Spirit has been given, that it presents the spiritual significance of feet-washing. We learn that it symbolizes the present service of the Lord whereby He removes from our spirits everything that would hinder part with Him.

Let us note the Lord does not say, part in Me. Precious indeed is the service of feet-washing and yet it would never secure "part in Christ." For this the greater work of the Cross was required, which, once accomplished can never be repeated. By this greater work part in Christ has been forever secured to every believer. Feet-washing is the symbolic setting forth on earth of a service continued in heaven—a service that enables believers on earth to hold communion with Christ in heaven: for do not the Lord's words "part with Me" signify communion with Himself, in that scene of holy affection in the Father's house? There is, indeed, the blessed fact that the Lord draws near to us and communes with us in our homes, as on the occasion when He entered the house at Emmaus; but part with Him, carries the yet more blessed thought that we can have communion with Him in His home, as was the case with the Emmaus disciples when, on the same night, they found the Lord in the midst of His gathered saints at Jerusalem. Again, do not the Lord's words to the Laodiceans set forth this double truth, when He can say, "If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

Further it would seem that feet-washing is not strictly a symbol of our Lord's service as the Advocate, nor of His priestly grace, though indeed it partakes of the nature of both. The priestly work of the Lord has in view our infirmities: the advocacy of the Lord deals with actual sins. Feet-washing removes the dullness of soul, and chilling of the affections that may arise in the pursuit of the daily life, and which effectually hinder communion with Christ where He is.

Weariness and weakness of body may hinder us from being a witness for Christ here; then the priestly grace of Christ is active to support us in our infirmities. Alas! we may break down and sin, and no longer be fit to witness for Christ; then the Advocate restores the soul. If however the affections have been chilled, though there may be nothing to disturb the conscience, there will be a grave hindrance to communion with Christ, and then the service of feet-washing comes in to remove the hindrance. There is, moreover, the further difference between advocacy and feet-washing, that, whereas advocacy restores our souls in the place where we are, feet-washing restores our spirits to communion with Christ in the place where He is.

In the days of Israel's journeying it was incumbent upon the priests to wash their feet before they entered the tabernacle. They might indeed have been fit for the people, the camp, and the wilderness, but fitness for the Lord's presence could only be secured by feet-washing. Hence the laver was before the door of the tabernacle (Exod. 30:17-21; 40:30-32).

(Vv. 9-11). What then is the nature of the service that is symbolized by feet-washing? The answer to Peter's first remark has shown that it has a spiritual significance; the answer to his second word tells us the end that it has in view; the answer to his last remark will indicate more clearly the nature, or manner of the service.

Peter, having obtained some glimpse of the blessedness of feet-washing, now goes back on his very determined avowal that the Lord shall never wash his feet. Moved by his real affection for the Lord, and with characteristic impulsiveness he says, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Whatever ignorance his remark betrays, it certainly expresses an affection which values part with Christ.

The Lord replies, "He that is washed all over needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit" (N. Tn.). In Scripture water is often used as a symbol of the cleansing effect of the Word of God. At conversion the Word is applied by the power of the Spirit, producing a thorough change, and imparting a new nature, which entirely alters the thoughts, words, and actions of the believer—a change signified by the Lord's words "washed all over." There can be no repetition of this great change, but those thus washed all over may oft-times grow dull of spirit. As the travelers' feet are soiled and wearied by the dust of the road, so the believer, in contact with the daily round, the duties of the home life, and the pressures of business life, as well as the continual conflict with evil, may often be wearied in spirit and thus hindered from having communion with Christ in His things. It is not that he has done anything that conscience would take account of, calling for confession and the work of the Advocate, but his spirit is wearied and needs to be refreshed, and such refreshment Christ delights to give if we will but put our feet into His hands. Turning to Him He will refresh our souls by presenting Himself before us, in all His perfections, through the Word.

Thus through the Lord's gracious answers to Peter we learn the spiritual character of this service, the end that it has in view, and the manner of its accomplishment.

Alas! there was one present for whom it would have no meaning: for the Lord has to say, "Ye are clean, but not all. For He knew who should betray Him; therefore said He, ye are not all clean." The betrayer had never been "washed all over." He was unregenerate, and as such would never feel the need, nor know the refreshment of the Lord's gracious service.

(Vv. 12-17). Having finished this service and resumed His seat at the table, the Lord gives us further instruction as to the service of feet-washing. While essentially His own service, yet it is one that He often carries out through the mediation of others. Thus we are put under the obligation, and given the privilege, of washing one another's feet. A blessed service, carried out, not by seeking to correct one another. (however necessary at times), still less by finding fault with one another, but by ministering Christ to one another, for only a ministry of Christ will bring refreshment to a wearied soul. Years after the scene in the upper room the Apostle Paul will tell us that one of the qualifications of a godly widow is that she has washed the feet of saints (1 Tim. v. 10). This surely does not imply that she was simply a rebuker of evil, or a corrector of faults, but rather that she refreshed the drooping spirits of the saints by coming from Christ with a ministry of Christ.

Did not Onesiphorus wash the feet of the Apostle Paul, for of him the Apostle can write, "He oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain" (2 Tim. 1:16)? Again, did not Philemon carry out this obligation towards his brethren, for to him Paul can say, "The bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother" (Philemon 7)? Was not the Lord Himself directly carrying out this blessed service when he spoke to His wearied servant Paul by night, saying, "Be not afraid... for I am with thee" (Acts 18:9, 10)?

Moreover feet-washing not only ministers refreshment to the wearied soul, but rejoices the heart of the one who carries out the service, for the Lord can say, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

At His Feet, At His Feet as a Worshipper

The beautiful scene that passes before us in the beginning of the twelfth chapter of John, takes place just six days before the cross. The Lord's devoted life, in which self was ever set aside to serve others in love, draws to its close. At every step of His path He had been dispensing blessing – spreading a feast, as it were, for all the world. Now, at last, a few of His loved ones make a feast for Him, as we read, "There they made Him a supper."

Christ was in this needy world as a Giver, but it was not often that anyone gave to Him. Once, in the beginning of His way, a few wise men "presented unto Him gifts" and had fallen down and "worshipped Him." Now, at the end of His path, they make a supper for Him and, again, one is found at His feet with her gifts as a worshipper.

Truly, too, there had been a moment when Levi had made Him "a great feast in his own house." There the Lord had sat down with "a great company of publicans and others" in order to dispense blessing to sinners. Now He sits down in company with a few of His own in order to receive the homage of saints.

Christ is the One for Whom they make the supper – the center of the feast and the Object before every heart. Lazarus, and others, are present, but, we read, they "sat at the table with Him." The supper was for Him, and the guests were "with Him." The blessedness, and the greatness, of the occasion were that He, the Son of God, was present.

Again, the two sisters, Martha and Mary, are present. Martha serves, but no longer is she cumbered with her service, or complaining of others. She thinks only of the One for whom they had made the supper. For the third time Mary is found at the feet of the Lord, but no longer to receive His words and His sympathy, but to give to Him the worship of a heart that loved Him, for Mary's gifts, Mary's acts, and Mary's attitude all breathe the spirit of worship.

Drawn by attachment of heart to Christ, she had sat at His feet, listened to His words and learned something of His mind. Now we see that affection for Christ is the secret of all true service. Moved by this love for Christ she does the right thing at the right moment. She might have left the ointment in the alabaster box and presented it to Christ, but this would not have put the same honor upon Christ. She pours it out upon His feet. She does the right act. She might, at some earlier moment in the Lord's life, have anointed His feet with the ointment, but she waits until the hour of His going to the cross and the grave has arrived. Moved by the instincts of love, she does the right act at the right moment, as the Lord can say, "Against the day of my burying hath she kept this." Christ is everything to Mary. Christ is her life, and all that she has is devoted to Him. The costly ointment and the hair of her head – the glory of a woman – are used to put honor upon Christ. She is not even praising Him for all that He had done, or was about to do, but she bows at His feet as a worshipper because of all that He is.

Thus acting, she puts honor upon the One that the world had rejected and was about to nail to a cross. She forgets herself and her blessings, and thinks only of Christ. How blessed if, when we make Him a supper, in a like spirit of worship, we could each one pass out of sight of ourselves and our blessings, and see no man any more save Jesus only and His glory.

Thus acting we should, like Mary in her day, be misunderstood by the world, and even by many true disciples, but we should, also like Mary, have the approval of the Lord. In the eyes of the world her act was mere waste. So in Christendom today, Christianity is viewed merely as a system for making the world a better and a brighter place. The one great aim is to benefit man; all else is waste. In one parable the Lord likens the kingdom of heaven to "a king who made a wedding feast for his son" (Matt. 22:2 JnD). In the spirit of this parable the disciples had made a supper for the Lord, and Mary had put honor upon Christ. Though the world may condemn, the Lord approves, for He says, "Let her alone," and again, in another gospel, He can say, "She hath wrought a good work upon Me." Indeed, so highly does the Lord appreciate Mary's act that, He adds, "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matt. 26:13).

Moreover, the Lord can say, "Me ye have not always." It will be our privilege and our joy to worship Him in glory, but it was Mary's privilege, and it is still ours, to worship Him in the world where He is rejected, and in the face of scorn and reproach of men. Mary seized the occasion to render to Him this precious service. As one has said, "She never could have recalled it in eternity ... Love will find new ways of expressing itself to Him then. But it will not be what He looks for from us now. There will be no self to be denied, no cross to be borne, no world to be surrendered, no reproach to be encountered then."

How blessed, too, was the effect of her act of devotion to Christ, for we read, "the house was filled with the odour of the ointment." Lazarus may hold sweet communion with Christ, and Martha may serve Christ, but Mary's act of worship, that was so precious to the heart of Christ, was also a joy to all that were in the house. That which gives honor to Christ will bring blessing to others.

We may rightly commune with Christ about many things, we may rightly serve Him in many ways, but the worship that makes everything of Christ will surpass all else in the day when we make Him a supper. So will it be in that great day when all the redeemed are gathered home. The new song will be sung, that renders praise to the Lord for all that He has done. Heaven and earth will join to celebrate His glory, but, above all, we read of those who "fell down, and worshipped Him." Beyond all the mighty work that He has done, and beyond all the glory that He has acquired, He will be worshipped because of all that He is. Then we shall be able to say,

The heart is satisfied; can ask no more;

All thought of self is now forever o'er:

Christ, its unmingled Object, fills the heart

In blest adoring love – its endless part.

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At His Feet, At His Feet as a Mourner

In the touching scene described in the eleventh chapter of John, we again hear of the two sisters, Martha and Mary. Sickness has ended in death casting its shadow over the home. Their brother has been taken from them.

In their trouble they rightly turn to the Lord as their unfailing resource, and very blessedly they plead His love for their brother, for they say, "He whom thou lovest is sick." This, indeed, was true. The Lord loved Lazarus, but we are also told that "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." As the story proceeds we are permitted to see the way love takes, in order to declare, on the one hand, the glory of the Son of God and, on the other, the compassions of the heart of Jesus.

Further, we again see the difference between these two devoted women. Martha who, on the former occasion, had been cumbered with her service when the Lord of life and glory had visited her house, is now restless and distracted when death has come into the home. Mary who, in the former day, had listened to His word, can now quietly wait for Him to speak and act. Thus we read, "Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him: but Mary sat still in the house." When, however, she received the word, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee," she at once acts in obedience to the word, for we read, "She arose quickly, and came unto Him."

"Then when Mary had come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet." For the second time this devoted woman is found in the lowly place at the feet of Jesus. The Jews, mistaking her action, say, "She goeth unto the grave to weep there." She was doing that which is far better, that which faith alone can do; she was going to the feet of Jesus to weep there. To weep at the grave of a loved one even the world can do, but it brings no comfort to the sorrowing heart. To weep at the feet of Jesus is to find the comfort of His love, for we weep at the feet of One who, in His own time, can raise our dead and, in the meantime, can comfort our hearts. So it came to pass that Mary, who had been at His feet as a learner, is now found at His feet as a mourner.

It is noticeable that in this touching scene there is no record of any word spoken by the Lord to Mary. This only we learn that, in the presence of her great sorrow, "Jesus wept."

The Jews wrongly interpret these tears as being a token of the Lord's love for Lazarus. He did indeed love Lazarus, but there was no need to weep for one that He was about to raise from the dead. It was the sorrow of the living that drew forth the tears of Jesus, as we read, "When Jesus ... saw her weeping, ... He groaned in the spirit and was troubled" and His trouble found vent in tears, for "Jesus wept."

In the days of old we read of Jehovah that "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (Psa. 147:3). In order to heal the broken-hearted He became flesh, and shed His tears to dry ours, and broke His heart to bind up our hearts.

And Jesus is still the same – "The same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." In our sorrows, and when our loved ones are taken from us, we still learn that our only real and lasting comfort is found in bowing at His feet, and pouring out our sorrow in the presence of the One who once wept with these broken-hearted women.

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