

The Triumphant Christ and His People

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There remains this one section where everything is gathered up into Christ and the believer.

I do want that we should really understand what it is that the Lord is bringing us to in these days in which we are living; that is, to understand, and very clearly apprehend, the super-earthly setting of all that is going on. (I have before used the word 'cosmic.' I do not like that word at all, and I am not sure that everybody understands or grasps the force of it; so perhaps if I say the super-earthly nature and setting of things, you will understand better what I mean.) The significance of that is that things are not limited to that which is going on on the earth, but there is another setting of everything, a spiritual background, and it is there that things pre-eminently count. That is the realm in which we are moving, and it is what relates to that that is heading up in these times to a final encounter and conclusion, and therefore it is necessary that we should be very much aware of that setting so far as Christ and believers are concerned.

We have all read accounts of the life of Christ, and we have found them more or less interesting and, in a way, profitable. We have found it interesting to know who the Roman rulers were in His days: what sort of place it was in which He was born: what Nazareth was like: the features of the Lake of Galilee: what sort of men the fishermen were; and a thousand and one other things like that related to His earthly life, all very informative and of a certain kind of value; but is that the life of Christ? Is that all? Is that the story of Jesus? You see what I mean. The real life of Christ was not in Galilee or Judea, not in this place or in that, amidst these scenes or those. The real life of Christ was altogether outside of that realm. The story of Jesus is a story which can never be written in terms of places and things and people. The real life, the real story, is back of all that. It is set in the super-earthly realm. Really, the interest is supernatural interest, not merely human. The whole thing has a meaning which may be entirely missed by studying only what He did and where He went, what He said and what happened to Him. It is that other that matters - the setting of it all as in eternity, as at the centre of a great universe, in the presence of spiritual and unseen intelligences and forces. That is where the life of Christ is written, that is where it is alone truly known, and, although we may have all the other information, with all its interest or even fascination, it does not get us very far. I ask you, how far will it get you, in your desperate and terrible conflict with sin and the powers of evil, to know that Jesus was born in a little village called Bethlehem with its terraces of houses, and so on? It does not get you very far, does it? But see that other scene and know what is happening there, and you may find that it has a very great bearing upon your deepest spiritual experience. That is what I mean by the super-earthly setting of it all, and it is with that that we are concerned for a little while now.

The Sphere of His Triumph

So we will first of all seek to see Christ as in that setting. We must therefore recognize that there was one inclusive thing at the heart of Christ's coming into this world. It had two sides, but it was one thing. On the one side, it was the undoing of the kingdom of Satan, in firstly the virtual, and then the ultimate, destruction of that kingdom. Virtual - yes, it was done. Ultimate - it has yet to be done. Demons recognised the significance of His presence. "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). "Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (Matt. 8:29). That points on to the ultimate destruction. But His presence then, and His Cross, were their virtual destruction. We come into the line of the second, the ultimate, when we come into the virtual; but that is for presently. On the one side, then, it was this destruction of the kingdom of Satan which lay right at the heart of Christ's coming; on the other hand, there was the inauguration of the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God - now its virtual inauguration, later its literal establishment. Those are the things which are central to His coming; not, coming to live the life of a good man, however good, and to propound certain teachings, 'the teachings of Jesus,' and to set a great example of how men ought to live, and then to be the supreme example of how men ought to be willing to die for their principles. How far short all that is of the real meaning!

Now then, there are three aspects of this of which we have just spoken. The first is the universal - what we have called the cosmic - relationship of everything in the life of the Lord Jesus, and that is outlined for us here in the incarnation, the temptation, the crucifixion, the resurrection and the exaltation.

(a) The Triumph of the Incarnation

Let us note how from its very commencement even before it actually happened - the incarnation, that coming in flesh and tabernacling amongst us, touched those cosmic, super-earthly factors of which we have been speaking: the factors which constitute the kingdom of Satan, the very nature of Satan - that pride, that rebellion,

that perversity by which that satanic kingdom is constituted and maintained here. I say, even before His birth that was touched. Listen again to the conversation which took place between the angel and Mary as this great proposition was put to her. It was not imposed upon her - that is the point; it was not something brought to her and of which it was said, 'This must be, you must do this, it is required of you.' No; it was a proposition, an intimation, the presentation to her of a great Divine thought and intention, involving her, so far as human life and relationships were concerned, in the most difficult and sensitive position; and that is suspended before her. She looks at it, weighs it up. She sees the implications on the human side. She sees what this could easily lead to - that she might be an outcast of society. We will not follow that. She is alive to it, and as you read that story it is not difficult to see, to feel, that a real battle is going on in her soul - a battle, and, at last, a victory; a victory in her will and a victory which requires the casting down to the earth of pride, of all self-interest. A mighty victory - "Be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38) - the absolute self-surrender of Mary to the will of God. "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord" - the servant spirit. You can see in the light of that what is being touched. If pride had had a place...! See what was involved so far as the kingdom of Satan was concerned. If self-interest had governed, if there had been rebellion, perversity, unwillingness to let go - well, I expect the Lord would have found another vessel, but, we do not know anything about that. What we do see here is the great drama of the ages concentrated in one woman's soul, and the issue is, Will she yield, let go, submit, to the will of God? It was in that self-abandonment that there came about that union of her will with the will of God which brought into being, so far as this earth was concerned, the One Who was going to dethrone Satan; and the very dethronement of Satan required the undoing of the pride, the rebellion, the perversity, the selfhood, which had asserted itself in God's universe; and the first battle was in that woman's soul. We have the Christmas season and we talk about the birth, but I do not think we have seen the terrific thing which lay behind the very first step in the incarnation, the setting of it right out there in that vast realm. We have been a little afraid of talking too much about Mary because of that wicked, pernicious system which exists, which worships her, and has given an exaggerated and false meaning to the words of her song - "Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Luke 1:48); and, of course, we have the phrase 'the blessed Virgin Mary' and we are afraid of it. Well, the devil is very clever. He has covered up, by that very falsehood, the truth that there in her soul the first steps were taken in the conquest of his kingdom - the overthrow of pride and the absolute surrender of will so that the will of the woman became one with the will of God, to make it possible for Gen. 3:15 to be fulfilled - "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head...."

But that is not all, even then, in the incarnation. There is the mystery of the virgin birth. We do not accept the theory of the 'immaculate conception' which makes Mary a sinless creature. In the genealogy of Mary there were sinful people and naturally she inherited a sinful nature: but the angel's words to her concerning "that holy thing" meant that Jesus would not inherit a sinful nature, but would be sinless, uncorrupted and incorruptible. By Divine act there was a clean cut between the first Adam and the last as to nature, and the last was an altogether other, which does not belong to this realm but to that which is over there, where God is in His apartness and in His difference, His 'otherness.' Somehow there is a miracle being wrought by the Holy Ghost to separate that Holy One from the unholy inheritance. It was necessary, you see, for the undoing of the kingdom of Satan. It is there, in the utter separateness of Christ from the first Adam, that this cosmic battle has its greatest force.

And then see how interested the other forces were in this whole matter. There is a tremendous activity going on, not only in Bethlehem's stable, and in the fields around and in the lands afar - whether it be the land from whence wise men come, or in Judea where Herod is. There is a very much bigger interest being taken in this whole thing. Here, upon that victory in the soul of that woman, with the principles that were involved, and that miracle of the Holy Ghost in cutting in between the stream of Adam's sin and that "holy thing" - here is focused the whole course of the battle of the ages; yes, Gen. 3:15, not only as a prophecy and a statement, but as something with tremendous, far-reaching consequences immediately arising. Oh, the murderer! The story of Cain and Abel shows us the beginning of the battle of the two systems, and that battle of two systems develops, expands, from individuals to tribes, from tribes to nations; and you see it all the way through the Bible, along two lines, on two grounds - murder and mixture. If the adversary cannot kill, as he sought to kill Moses and others of the servants of the Lord who were in the line - if he cannot slay the elect people and destroy them directly, he will entice them, he will ensnare them, he will somehow bring in mixture, by mixed marriages, mixed worship, and accomplish his end. The Bible is just full of that - murder and mixture in order to frustrate the overthrow of the evil kingdom and the coming in of this other; and it is all that universal interest and concern that is focused here upon the incarnation. It is that which lies behind Herod's murderous, iniquitous, barbarous edict to destroy all the male children. We have known that done before to get another in this line - in order to catch one, just one. The devil stands at nothing to get his object. The incarnation is set in that realm. The birth of the Lord Jesus - oh, would to God we could strip it of a lot of that which has come in and simply ruined its spiritual value, these annual festivities! If only we could see what a tremendous thing this is,

beyond all that has to do with eating and drinking, and so on, on this earth! I think I have said enough to indicate that in every one of these points the setting is the same.

(b) His Triumph in Temptation

The temptation, we know, was in that setting, and the same factors were in that temptation. What were they? - mixture or murder. Does that need threshing out in the three temptations of the Lord Jesus after His baptism? It is quite clear that seduction was the enemy's object - to seduce Him on to his, the enemy's, ground. "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:9). 'You can have, if...' Seduction by bribery; and by bribery, corruption. The enemy will even quote Scripture to seduce, urging the Lord to cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple on the ground of a certain promise in Scripture. "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: ...On their hands they shall bear thee up, lest haply thou, dash thy foot against a stone." But the Lord's response exposed the snare - "Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God." There are some ways in which God will not preserve us - the ways of presumption. Presumption is the way of the devil. David might well pray, "Keep back thy servant... from presumptuous sins" (Psa. 19:13). It would have been presuming upon God and His word to have done it at the suggestion of Satan. You see the subtlety and depth of the seductive art to corrupt, to murder. God could not have kept Him in that way, and He would have died. How deeply laid was that plan! Yes, His temptation is set in a far bigger world than men have made of it. What a lot we have read about these temptations, purely of an earthly nature and meaning.

(c) The Triumph of His Death

As for the crucifixion - our earlier meditations have been enough to show that the crucifixion was something more than the death of a good man for his convictions. It had very far-reaching meaning, far beyond this earth. The Apostles give us very clear indication of what took place out there when He stripped off principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His Cross (Col. 2:15). That is the setting.

(d) The Triumph of His Resurrection and Exaltation

As for His resurrection and exaltation, well, listen to Paul again - "When he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:20-21). That is not earthly, that is not just here. We see the setting of Christ's raising and exaltation.

What we have thus far said is only the first of the things included in this great setting - the universal or cosmic relationship of everything where Christ was concerned.

The Dynamic Power of His Life

The second thing is that which is gathered into the word 'life.' That was the focal point, that was where the issue was really centred. Life! The Lord Jesus knew that He had come with a dynamic force and virtue which would answer everything. "I came that they may have life" (John 10:10). "I give unto (my sheep) eternal life" (John 10:28). He knew that He had in His possession a dynamic force, the nature and the power of which would solve everything - what we call Divine life. It is not only a force, it is a force because it is a nature; its power is found in its nature. It is Divine, it is life. One thing against which the enemy is set is that. All his activities are centred upon that life - firstly to prevent men receiving it. And what lengths he will go to in offering alternatives and substitutes and imitations rather than that they should have the real, the genuine, thing! What colossal systems of religion he will build up just to get in the way of one thing - to prevent the reception of Divine life, the very life of God Himself. And then, when he has been outwitted and the life is received and within, if he can by any means do so he will throttle that life. He will set himself to destroy the vessel of that life, the very body in which it exists; and how many arts there are to do that! How much wisdom is needed by the children of God to see to it that they do not violate the laws of Divine life! If that life can be by any means suppressed, thwarted, hindered, limited, then that is the enemy's object - to do it.

On the other hand, how great is the need of the Lord's people for understanding and education as to the ways of that life, and that they should not touch that in which death is. That is the real battle all the way along. You know, I am sure, what I mean by touching death. You know it in your own heart. If you speak a proud word, if you begin to boast as a Christian of anything that is earthly, personal, if you speak or act in ways which are unseemly for a child of God, what is the feeling? Something seems to have died within you - that is the feeling, as though something had died. Your joy, your rest, your peace, your sense of the Lord's nearness, have gone under a cloud. Something has happened; you know it; you have touched death. The ways of life demand that

you should not do that sort of thing. You learn; the Spirit of life is within, teaching in that way. That is anticipating the believer's education, but it is helpful here to see. This is the thing which relates to that great cosmic conflict; it is life. If that life can get in and have its way, and if the Lord's people will learn how to co-operate with and correspond to the laws of that life, why, in them and therefore because of them, Satan is losing ground all the time, and the other kingdom of the Son of God's love is gaining ground, because that kingdom also is not an external system; it is a spiritual thing which has to do with our inner life. Let us leave that there.

Believers in the Sphere of His Triumph

There is a third thing to be mentioned - a multiplied seed. This is His way - a corn of wheat passing its life through death into a hundred, a thousand, other corns, multiplying and multiplying. That is, the union, the organic and vital union, of believers with Christ by which is fulfilled in a spiritual sense the ordinance - "Be fruitful, and multiply" (Gen. 1:22); by Divine life transmitted through His death, a multiplied seed. That is the way to the undoing of the kingdom of Satan, that is the vessel set in the midst of the whole universal scene.

(a) Triumph in a New Life Imparted

Now what is true of Christ is true of believers, because we have simply passed from Him personally to Him corporately. We have to see that, just as much in our case as in His, we are set in that cosmic setting. Our lives as believers, as children of God, are set in and given that universal significance. What is the meaning of new birth? We have reduced that and limited it far too much to a matter of our personal avoidance of hell and entrance into heaven, of escaping the misery of our sins and coming into salvation and therefore into peace, and when we have got there, well, perhaps we shall learn a few things and grow in grace a little; but it remains very largely for a multitude of people quite a personal matter - their salvation and the salvation of a lot of other persons as such - and it all ends with the persons. But is that all? What is new birth? Well, it is what we have just been saying: this new life, which cannot be overcome of death, introduced to a new organism - "quickened... together with Christ... and raised up with him" (Eph. 2:5,6) - a new organism with a new life, this Divine life, imparted. And then the battle starts. Why do we not understand the elementary conflicts of a new born child of God? It is not until a child is born that the battle starts; and the battle starts inside. Why? Because with the birth of the child, it is set in a world of other relationships where it is no longer just an individual with a world to itself. It is now set in another world; there must be other wills and other ideas; and it finds itself up against something more. Its own life comes into conflict with the life of that world. If you try to perpetuate the conditions of the life of the newborn child afterward, and make the whole world belong to that child, you will ruin it. We speak of spoilt children; what do we mean? We mean that we have made them the centre of the world, as though the world was created for them and they are to have everything they ask for, and to be denied nothing. By such treatment we are countering the whole principle of life in a child, that of responsibility.

Carry that over to the spiritual, for it is only a parable. When we are born anew, and that Divine life is found within, we are introduced into a world which is a world of conflict; that life in us is at once thrown out into a realm of conflict, of contending wills, and our spiritual education begins along that line and that life has got to find its own inherent, natural potentialities of overcoming. That is exactly why Satan has been left here. You may ask yourself often why, when the Lord Jesus met him in the Cross, did He not utterly wipe him out? If only He had done that, look what a lot would have been prevented! Look at all the centuries of trouble for which he is responsible! Why did not the Lord finish him there and then? The answer is that in doing as He did the Lord is going to get much more than He would have done by finishing him. He has given us a chance of proving the tremendous potency of Divine life, even to the point where that life is ultimately triumphant over all the power of death. It begins in new birth. Birth from above is a tremendous thing in all it points to and includes.

(b) Triumph in Transformation of Character

We go on to transformation. What is the transformation of the believer? In a word, it is simply breaking down on the one hand and building up on the other. In the physical realm that is going on in the body of every one of us. There are two things going on, one breaking down the food we eat and extracting the food properties. This is called katabolism. The other activity is the positive building up of the body by means of the breaking down of the food compounds and the liberation of their potential energies. This is called anabolism. The word which covers both of these processes is metabolism, which means, change of life. We all know how changed we feel after healthful food when the body is needing it. It is like that spiritually. Transformation in the Christian life is like that. This life process in us is breaking down and getting rid of what is poison and not required; saying, 'No, that is not good, we do not want that, that must go'; on the other hand, there is the inward witness, 'This is what we need, what we want, this builds up.' If Christians do not know and are not learning consciously what is

good and what is not good for them spiritually, there is something wrong with their spiritual health. If the life of God is having its way in us, those two things are going on. We are getting more intelligent to things that will not help us, and we cast them off; on the other hand, we do know what is good, what is of value spiritually, and we say, 'That is what I am after.' It is spiritual intelligence, and by this twofold process of breaking down and building up we are being changed. It is a life action. The transformation of believers comes along that line.

(c) Triumph in Learning Christ through Trial

And you gather into that all the New Testament has to say about spiritual understanding - being "filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Our Christian education, then, lies in that direction, but it comes along the line of testing, trial, adversity, suffering. If we know anything at all, we have learned it through suffering, through trial, through adversity. If we know the Lord, how do we know Him? Well, our real knowledge of the Lord is not book knowledge, but just what we have learned in the fires, in the trials. We come to knowledge when we have been really up against things with the enemy.

(d) Triumph in Manifestation of Secret Victories

We pass on for a word on the manifestation of believers. What do we mean? I am putting this all in that fuller, higher, spiritual realm. The manifestation? - well, Romans 8 tells us, all about that. "The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God" (8:19). When the education is complete and the graduation takes place, that which has been going on under cover, hidden deep down in the believers, will be revealed. A great deal goes on unsuspected by even those nearest at hand - all those secret battles that others know nothing about, all those conflicts in which we have to get away alone and seek the Lord for grace, victory and strength. The whole cumulative conflict of the spiritual life, though so largely hidden from view, has been having an effect, it has been doing something, it has been changing us, making us different, making us more Christ-like, more gentle, more humble, more dependent. It has all come out of the secret education, but it is all going to be manifested; sons are going to be manifested, and with their manifestation it is going to be found that that is what the whole creation has been waiting for. Why, the creation was made for this, for a people to occupy it who are like the Lord - full of His glory. And when that is wrought out, then the creation's meaning is explained, and the creation itself is delivered from the bondage of corruption. That brings us to our final word - glorification.

(e) Triumph in Glorification

I pass over this very rapidly and in a general way. After all, glorification is only the manifestation of that life in fulness. It is the very nature of that Divine life brought out to fulness; and with that, the great cosmic battle ends. When we are manifested with Him in glory the fight is finished, the war is at an end, Satan has no more ground and no more place, and the new Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven.

That is a lot said. I am only concerned that our breadth, expansiveness of thought, and many words, may not take away from the immediate challenge and import. That is the thing that we are in now. It is a grim business. There are tremendous issues hanging upon this whole matter of our setting - from our spiritual birth to our manifestation in glory; tremendous things hanging upon our spiritual life - upon what is going on in us, how we are learning, how we are growing, how that life is having its way, how we are coming to know the Lord, and how we are counting in the unseen. True value does not attach to us merely as people belonging to a religion called Christianity, who believe and do certain things, but our real value is as living men and women who count, just as our Lord counted, out there in the realm far beyond this earth surface. If we do not count there it is all a caricature, it does not mean anything at all. The Lord make us count for Him in that way!