



Articles and Sermons :: We Beheld His Glory - Volume Two

We Beheld His Glory - Volume Two - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/6/15 8:16

Chapter 1 - From the Individual to the Corporate

READING: John 10.

At this point in the Gospel of John we find ourselves in the presence of a distinct transition. Up to this point, everything has been individual; a long series of individuals or individual cases have been in view. At this point a change takes place: we pass from what is individual to what is collective and corporate. Henceforth what will be in view will be a company. It will be collective, in the sense that all the parts represented in the first half of the Gospel will be brought together and found gathered into this company. It will be corporate, because a common life is the basis of everything.

We make a distinction between what is collective and what is corporate. Note this distinction. A congregation is not necessarily a body. It is collective, because a lot of units are brought together into one place; but a body presupposes an organic oneness, on the basis of life. Life is here clearly seen to be the basis of what is corporate: as in the case of the flock, where the members share a common life; or as in the case of the vine, which is an organism where all the many parts are made a unity by the one life. And so we find that, from this point onward, all that has hitherto been said about life as related to individuals, is now reproduced in principle in a corporate company, a corporate body, in the sense of many being one because of one life.

Chapter 10 introduces the characteristics of what is corporate, and specifically the characteristics of this corporate body or company which is in view.

Let us underline the fact of the transition. If the Holy Spirit is to be true to the Divine mind, there is bound to come a point in the history of any local company when if He is allowed to have a free way quite spontaneously things pass from what is just individual to what is corporate. It is a spontaneous and inevitable movement, because it is perfectly clear from all the Scriptures that God has purposed to realize His full design, not in separate, unrelated parts, but in a corporate whole, on the basis of life. So I repeat, if the Spirit of God is in charge, He will be consistent with the Divine mind, and, sooner or later, where He is really in charge of a company, things must inevitably pass from mere individualism to the corporate. It is not announced at this point in the Gospel that that is the nature of the change, but it is perfectly clear, and it is something that we should take account of for ourselves.

We are very fond of this chapter; we should be very sorry to lose John 10. We should also be very sorry to lose John 15. These chapters on the sheep and the vine are very precious portions of God's Word. But let us take note that the values contained in these chapters are corporate values, and can only be enjoyed by the individual in a corporate relationship. That will be borne out as we go on.

What I am trying to emphasize and make clear at this point is that this matter is in the hands of the Holy Spirit, who is so consistent with the thought of God as to bring about quite naturally a spontaneous transition from the individual to the corporate at some point in our spiritual course. To fail to recognize that, and to fail to be in that movement of the Spirit, means to be left with just the spiritual measure that an individual can have, which is far short of what the Body can have; and I think this explains a very great deal of the limitation in literally multitudes of very devoted and earnest Christians, who are just individual Christians, living individual lives, trying to be individuals devoted to the Lord. There is limitation in that, and so, noting the movement of the Spirit of God in this matter, we should be intent upon knowing what the characteristics of that corporate life and Body are.

Another thing about the matter presented in chapter 10 is that, in common with all new beginnings of God, it contains the germs of all future development. I think you are aware of the principle that, when God takes a fresh step, in that fresh step there is inherent, in principle and in germ form, all that will eventually develop. We will not stay to illustrate this from other passages, but it can be seen here, and you will be able to follow it as we go on. Suffice it to say that all that is going to come out later on, not only in John's Gospel but in the whole revelation of the New Testament, will be found in a few basic principles in this very chapter.

The Rightful Shepherd

The first characteristic, then, of this corporate company, now introduced, is Christ, the authoritative Shepherd. It is a question of who is the rightful shepherd, who has the right to be the shepherd, who stands in that position and relationship by God's own appointment, approval and seal. Whom has the Father sealed? You notice that word. "Him the Father, even God, hath sealed", (John 6:27). "Sanctified", (John 10:36) and "sealed." It is the question of the authority and right to be the shepherd. His own words about Himself are not just that He is good, in the sense of moral goodness. They go further than that. They declare that, on the basis of that goodness of character, He is the true Shepherd.

We could very much enlarge upon Christ's right on the basis of His character, His nature, to be the shepherd. For the present we must note that, before there can be a real spiritual company, in the good of God's blessing in fulness, Christ must be in His place as rightful Shepherd, rightful Lord, the One in whom there must be reposed absolute confidence, about whose position there must be no question.

Antagonism to the Shepherd and His Flock

That stands so strikingly in contrast to the atmosphere surrounding Him in the chapter which we have read. We note the steadily intensifying atmosphere of question as to His right, antagonism to His claims, refusal to acknowledge Him. In the end of the chapter is a company who "believed on him there", who repudiated the repudiators, who stood against the whole atmosphere charged with questions about Him. You see, this antagonism is a very strong thing. It is something malicious, malignant, very strongly evil, as to the place of the Lord Jesus, His title, His rights; and it is over against this that such a company will have to stand. If you and I are to be found in all that it means to be really members of that elect Body, we are going to be in a relatedness which has the whole malignant force of hell set against it, because it is standing for the rights of the Lord Jesus.

From the beginning, Satan and his whole company have been set against the rights of the Lord Jesus. Satan is not against us as Christians, he is not against us in ourselves. We do not meet this antagonism simply because we have become members of the Christian fold. You can be that - you can be Christians in name, in title, in profession, and never meet the fury of hell; but stand in this relatedness of one life on the ground of the absolute sovereign Lordship, authority and right of Jesus Christ, and you are involved in that which He found Himself. There will be plenty of stones taken up; there will be plenty done to bring to an end that testimony. This corporate company will meet much more even than the individuals as such. The individuals will find that they have to encounter very much more when they stand on the ground of the oneness of the Body of Christ than they would if they stood on an independent, individualistic ground. So that the very first characteristic of this corporate expression of Christ and His life is the testimony that the rights are all His, that He alone occupies this place of Shepherd.

An Elect Company

The next thing which becomes so clear in this chapter, which I hinted at just now, is that this is an elect company. We are now, of course, able to read this chapter in the light of the fullest revelation of the truth, brought us later in the New Testament particularly through Paul, although not through him alone, that the Church is an elect Body. While the Lord Jesus speaks of Himself as having been sanctified and sealed by the Father, He speaks in similar language of the sheep. How often it is from this point onward that the Lord Jesus is found to be speaking of "those whom the Father hath given me", "those whom thou gavest me"; and here in this chapter we read: "I know mine own", "I know them", "mine own know me." There is something about them that marks them off as known of God, foreknown of God, and He distinctly says to these other people that the reason they do not believe, they do not hear and they do not know His voice, is because they are not of His sheep. If they were His sheep, they would know His voice, but they are not, and that by their own exercise of will. "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life."

Two Folds

The next thing here is the division which immediately appears and broadens when He is in His place, and when He is securing that elect company. There are here in this chapter, mentioned or implied, two folds, and He says quite clearly that He came to lead His flock out of one fold and that He is making another fold. It does not require a great deal of insight to recognize what the two folds are. There is a little fragment which is the key to it. "God sent forth his Son... born under the law... that he might redeem them which were under the law", (Gal. 4:4-5). That is only saying, in other words, "that He might get them out of that fold, that legalistic fold." The whole atmosphere of this chapter speaks of the legalistic fold the fold of Judaism, where it is law. This is in keeping with the introduction to this Gospel: "The law was given through Mose

s; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ", (John 1:17). The Lord saw a fold - and what a fold it was, and what shepherds they were! Firstly, they had made the sheep that were really His their own. They therefore regarded Him as a "sheepstealer." Then the effect of their relationship to the sheep was to bring them into spiritual bondage, to limit their spiritual growth, and to make them servants of a tradition, an earthly and man-controlled system, rather than the Lord's free people. It would not be a bit helpful to pursue that thought, but it is very like some forms of Christianity as we know them. That is the kind of fold - hard, legalistic, selfish. Christ came to lead His sheep out from that fold, and to bring them into another - the fold of grace, liberty, life, life more abundant, and all the full heavenly purpose for the Church.

So the two folds are, clearly, the fold of merely traditional religion, and the fold of spiritual truth, reality and life in Christ.

The Way from the Fold of Law to the Fold of Grace

What is the way out and the way in? The way out and the way in is Christ's death. "I lay down my life for the sheep." Here it is not so much the sin question that is to the fore, although that lies, of course, at the root of everything. He was "born under the law." His death was to extricate from that fold, that system, that deadly thing that was against them "the bond written in ordinances that was against us", (Col. 2:14). He laid down His life for the sheep. His death was the way out. The whole of the New Testament afterward bears down upon this, that it is by the death of the Lord Jesus that we are delivered from the bondage of the law - that law which is constantly and eternally battering us with our own sin, breaking and shattering us with our own state. His death is the way out; His resurrection is the way in. "Who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible", (1 Pet. 1:3-4). So deliverance by the death of Christ is one of the characteristics of the company. They have come into the good and value of the delivering death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, with all its blessing and enlargement. They stand on that ground.

Let me return to something I said a little earlier, that while individuals, of course, come that way and they must so come - we must recognize that death with the Lord Jesus, and resurrection in union with Him, sees the end of all individualism. God's intention is to bring to an end what is merely individual. There must be an individual entering in, but for it to remain an individual thing is contrary to the meaning of the death of Christ. Right from this time onward, it is seen in this Gospel that the full blessing lies on the far side of Jordan. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were a much more integrated people on the other side of the Jordan than they were before; and when you get on the far side of the death of Christ you are immediately found as a part of a people, and not just as individuals.

So it is in the New Testament. You come to Colossians and Ephesians, or to what is represented by those letters. You find immediately that you are "raised together with him." It is the Church that is in view; you have left merely individual ground, you are now on corporate ground. Christ's death is intended to bring that about. If we have not apprehended that, we are still in the limitation which a merely individual life must know. It is very important for us to recognize that.

It is all a matter of God's purpose. What is God's purpose? What is revealed to be "the eternal purpose... purposed in Christ Jesus"? You will find always that the Scriptures demand the Church for the eternal purpose; the whole Body which gives Christ the vessel for His collective and corporate expression. That is the way of the eternal purpose, and it is on resurrection ground that we come into it. Therefore that which is only individualistic goes out with the death of Christ, and in the resurrection of Christ it is found no more in the thought of God. Christ's death is the way out; Christ's resurrection is the way in. That is the principle here enunciated.

"They Know My Voice"

The next thing is that, because of the relationship which we have set forth Christ in unquestioned and undisputed authority; because they have been brought out through His death and resurrection from the realm of law to the realm of grace, that is, from mere profession to the realm of life ("I give unto them eternal life"; "I came that they may have life and may have it abundantly"); because of their life-relationship with Him, through His death and resurrection, there is an inward "something" about this company, an inward correspondence with Him. "My sheep hear my voice"; "they know my voice." You cannot explain that in language. It is something that goes beyond language, it is something that can only be known in fact. It is one of those mysteries of John. ("How can a man be born when he is old? - 3:4. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" - 6:52.) But it is fact.

I have often recounted an experience I had once at a place in the Near East, where, from various directions, shepherds were coming to a well with their mixture of sheep and goats following them. As they came to the well, all the sheep and goats got mixed up. I stood a little way off, watching this. I saw them all merge, and saw the shepherds get together and

have a talk. I thought, "This is a glorious mix-up! What is going to happen? how will they be able to get their flocks sorted out?" So I waited until the shepherds had finished their talk and had decided it was time to move off. One shepherd simply walked right away. He got right away up on the hill and turned round and started calling a strange note - I could not reproduce the sound. And those sheep began to open up, and his own flock just went up there to him, and all the rest were left. Each shepherd had his own note and call. The sheep knew the voice of their shepherd. I thought it was marvelous how those sheep should know. Well, they had learned to know. "The sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name... and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow." If I had tried to imitate that shepherd, I should have got no response at all; but they knew him.

There is something of an inward correspondence which we know by the Spirit. We know when the Holy Spirit speaks to us. And we usually know when the stranger speaks; we detect something strange, something foreign, about it; it does not answer nor correspond to the Lord in us; we are not happy about it. It is a mystical something, but very real. That is the basis of spiritual intelligence, and it is the point I am stressing. Those who are of this company, of this corporate Body, have an inward correspondence with the Lord, a basic spiritual intelligence whereby they know Him. They do not always have to be told by others, "This is what the Lord wants," or "That is not what the Lord wants." They may be helped by counsel; but there is a place, a position, of walking with the Lord where we do not have to be told, where we know, even if it is by making mistakes - we know by the reaction of the Spirit of the Lord in us. The point is that there is a spiritual intelligence which is essential to the purpose of God in the company He is securing in relation to His Son.

These are principles; they are not expounded, but they are there in this tenth chapter of John's Gospel. It is a wonderful chapter, and what we have said is only a very small part of its content. But let us seek to grasp these tremendous basic laws of God's eternal purpose into which we are called in Christ, and to lay them to heart and ask the Lord to work them into us, so that they are not merely things in the Scripture or in an address; they are realities in our spiritual life.

We Beheld His Glory - Volume Two - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/6/17 5:11

Chapter 2

Reading: John 11 and 12

"Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that if thou believedst, thou shouldest see the glory of God ?", (John 11:40)

"And Jesus answereth them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.", (John 12:23).

Chapters eleven and twelve have to be taken together, for they are part and counterpart. From the above citations from each it will be seen that, once again, the governing factor is the glory of the Son of Man as the Son of God.

Before we can rightly understand the subject-matter of the chapters we need to understand the meaning of glory.

What the Glory of God Is

The glory of God is the _expression of the satisfaction of His nature. When and where God's nature - His very being - is satisfied, that satisfaction emanates, and there is a spirit of inexpressible joy, peace, rest, beauty, wonder, harmony, and life. All these elements are the components or constituents of what is called "Glory." When any person is filled with this spirit and experiences something of these elements, almost the only suitable and adequate exclamation is "Glory!"

"O, what a foretaste of glory Divine!"

If our whole life was gathered up into one particular object and concern, so that we had nothing else to justify our existence, and that object was a consuming passion, so that for it we lived, thought, planned, sacrificed, suffered, worked, and longed with an unutterable longing; and then that object was realized, reached, possessed: if that happened, we should be quite unable to shut it all in to ourselves it would break out and affect all around us. In its realm it would be what we would call "Glory" we should exclaim, "Isn't it glorious?!"

Well, lift it all into the so much greater and higher realm of Infinite God; make it eternal and not of time; spiritual and not merely temporal; immortal and not corruptible; and that - where it exists - is Divine glory, and it is affecting and wonderfully satisfying.

God's nature craves for that which corresponds to it. God's nature contains the elements of His purpose and desire. Out

of His very being He has projected His purpose. To that purpose He has committed Himself; has planned, laboured, thought, sacrificed, suffered, longed; and for its sake He is never resting. When He sees it, in its beginning or increase, in its principle or growth, His "good pleasure," satisfaction and joy are ministered to, so that those concerned register and share His satisfaction; and that is "Glory."

This, then, is the key to John's "Gospel," and to these two chapters in particular. Let us use the key.

Death - the Counter to Glory

Here is Lazarus. It is a fair and beautiful human scene. Strong affection between sisters and brother; a lovely home, to which Jesus turned when He could, knowing of a warm welcome, a deep understanding and appreciation - even if sometimes, under peculiar stress, there may have been a little domestic tension. This scene is broken into by sickness and - death!

Death is the enemy of all that is beautiful. Death is always death, whether it be our death or the Lord's death. When it says of Him that "He tasted death", it means that it was the bitterest and most devastating cup that He drank. Death is always the breakdown of Divine purpose, the contradiction to God's will; the veil over the Divine glory. Death - if it remains - is a closed door.

But more - death is no mere hap, chance, accident; the natural termination of a tenure of life! If the Bible is clear on anything, it is certainly clear on this, that death was not intended, but is the result of a wrongful exercise of choice - the exercise of choice in a manner contrary to the will of God. That exercise is called Sin, and its wages are not the grateful emoluments of services rendered, but judgment upon a state and position altogether contrary to the Creator's mind.

Death declares that there is something that does not, and never can, bring satisfaction to God's nature. There is that which declares a Divine halt, not a Divine purpose. There is no glory in death! Some people may labor to sublimate death; others declare, "There is no death"; but the Bible just stands by its own definition and declaration: "the last enemy... death", and it is for "abolition," not bowing out or sublimating.

Such then is the setting of John 11.

We must next see the immediate implication of the Bethany scene and event; for there is something of deliberateness, both in what Jesus said about it, and in His strange behavior over it.

"This sickness is... for the glory of God."

"Jesus... abode... where he was."

"Lazarus is dead."

That is the death side. It had a twofold significance: the first is in chapter 11, and the second in chapter 12.

(1) Lazarus as Representing Israel

It is significant that this "Gospel" stands so largely in relation to a Jewish background. See, for example, the references to Jewish Feasts. Then see how everything is in contention with - or by - Jewish Rulers and Teachers. We saw this in our last chapter, in relation to the Shepherd and the flocks and folds. It is not possible to separate the "signs" (miracles) of John's Gospel from the spiritual state of Israel at the time. Hence Lazarus speaks of Israel's condition, need, and only hope.

We have to remember the affectional side. It is clearly stated that "Jesus loved... Lazarus." Lazarus was called "he whom thou lovest", and when Jesus wept the comment of the bystanders was: "Behold how he loved him." Whatever may have been the stem and angry attitude of Jesus toward the "blind leaders", and toward the cold and deadly system which Judaism had become, there is no question as to His love for Israel. See, for example, His tears and hear His lament over Jerusalem. If His way over Lazarus seems strange, it is not lack of love, but rather love's clear discernment of the only way of hope. Lazarus "is sick", and who will say that Israel was not desperately sick in those days? So desperately sick, and of such a sickness, that there is no remedy, no cure, no healing, no patching up. There will be no intervention to preserve and prolong that Israel. Israel must die; that is the only way of any hope or glory at all.

So Lazarus dies. But more - he is left in death until the verdict of nature is: "he stinketh." There is an Old Testament

word which says that a consequence of disobedience in Israel - if persisted in - would be that they would become a byword among nations - metaphorically they would stink in their nostrils. How true that has become! So Lazarus sets forth God's estimate of, and verdict upon, Israel. "The wound has become incurable."

We leave that for the moment, and go to the second aspect.

(2) Lazarus as Representing Mankind

Throughout the "Gospel," and with Israel as an illustration, the state and need of mankind as a whole is revealed. There is a very significant change of title from chapter 11 to chapter 12. In 11 it is "Son of God" several times. In 12 that title is not used, but "Son of Man" is. There is a sense in which the former title was peculiarly the challenge and test to Israel at that time. Of course it is always so, in every realm, but Israel's day was closing and it would close on this issue peculiarly. The world's day is not yet at its close - although it may very nearly be. But it will be governed by the same issue as was Israel's.

The point here is that the transition from the immediate emphasis upon Son of God to Son of Man is just the widening of the circle to the whole race, for Son of Man is a racial designation, not only a national. What was true of Lazarus as representing the state and need of Israel is true of the whole human race. Incurable, sick unto death; dead, and stinking. That is the true verdict; that is God's attitude. The only hope is in resurrection, a new beginning, and that by and with Jesus Christ. That natural state of man can never bring satisfaction to God, therefore there can never be any glory there. It is a nature utterly different from God's.

So the events of Bethany pass by swift and direct transition to 12:24: the corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying, in order that a new organism may appear with a propagating life. Connected with this are the explicit statements concerning the Cross (verses 31-34).

The Cross Is an End

What was it, and is it, that necessitated the holding back of Jesus until Lazarus had been in the grave four days? Why should it be a part of the drama that, when there is true description and admission made, the expression "he stinketh" should be the only appropriate one? The answer is that man at some time (we know when) became infected by a fatal virus called "self", and the essence of self is pride.

"God beholdeth the proud afar off."

"Jesus... abode... in the place where he was."

"Pride is an abomination unto God."

It is the selfhood of man, his self-sufficiency, self-importance, self-will, self-occupation, etc., which will not allow Jesus to be absolute Lord and God, that makes it necessary for the Cross to engulf him. There is no hope for him until he sees himself crucified with Christ and buried with Him! When Paul followed the infinite descent of Christ from the glory of equality with God as His right, down through incarnation and emptying, he concluded the emptying course with "Yea, the death of the Cross", as though nothing could so completely demonstrate the meaning of Christ's death; not a vestige of honor or pride, or respect, or glory. "My God... thou hast forsaken me."

It requires a true apprehension of the meaning of Christ's death to come to the place where it is not only a sentiment uttered, but a course taken -

"When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,

pour contempt on all my pride."

This nature governed by the self principle is in the way of corruption, and is ineligible for glory. Let it go where God has put it, and let us look to and hope alone in Jesus - "the resurrection and the life." There must be just as real a crisis in our lives as there was in Bethany. The state was incurable. Death was a terrible reality. Jesus met it at its uttermost point and, through the power of His own other and different life, completely overthrew it. These are the truths represented in Bethany and Lazarus - truths which are the substance of the Gospel, both for the saved and the unsaved, and borne out by all the subsequent New Testament teaching.

Resurrection - The Ground of Glory

In resurrection God starts all over again with a New Creation; and in a spiritual and real way that New Creation will receive the same verdict as that which was originally given concerning the material and illustrative old creation. "God saw that it was good." "God rested." "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." God, finding His nature satisfied, expresses that satisfaction. And then there follows the inclusive verdict: "We beheld his glory."

This can be put to the test in the simplest ways. When one, knowing himself or herself to be a sinner, hopeless and brokenhearted, with God afar off, turns and, seeing in Jesus God's way, says, "Lord, I believe!" - the issue is that the heart is filled with such a sense of rest, satisfaction, and joy, that the only suitable word to describe it is "Glory."

The same is true when a controversy has arisen between a child or servant of God and his or her Lord. The glory goes out. But let that whole matter be brought to the Cross and acknowledged to be what it is - a reasserting of the natural life or self - let that be put where God has put it, in the grave of Jesus, and once more rest and unspeakable relief fill the heart, and the glory returns.

So we note some other features of the glory.

There is the quick transition from the individual and personal to the collective and corporate. The next scene after the raising of Lazarus is the feast at Bethany. The feast is made for Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. They are eating and drinking together with Him on the ground of a new life. His glory is manifested, not only in the one, but in the many. This leads to a new act of worship. Worship is always the very essence of glory.

From one corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying there comes the "much fruit," many corns and ears of corn; at length a mighty harvest, of which Jesus was the "Firstfruits."

In relation to the corn of wheat He said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified", and it was so! From Calvary - the Passover - came Pentecost, and who will say that Pentecost was not glory?

But - and there is always someone lurking in the shadows to spoil - it was not long before reactions set in and Judas and all his ilk set a counter-movement going. How the Devil hates to see Jesus glorified! How his jealousy and envy are stirred to overflowing hatred when he sees a company bound together in one life, feasting with Christ in worshipping love! Bitter, bitter is his spite at that, and he will ruin it if he can! So it was, and so it will ever be.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." (Ps. 133:1). But Satan hates it, and sees in it the undoing of all his work to rob Christ of His inheritance. After the feast, Judas and the Pharisees. After Pentecost, Herod and the world.

But the far end of all is the glory - God's nature satisfied, and that satisfaction displayed in the New Jerusalem - "having the glory of God."

We Beheld His Glory - Volume Two - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/6/19 13:04

Chapter 3

Reading: John 13:1-17; Leviticus 8:24; Exodus 30:18-21; Romans 6:4, 8:1,2,4; 1 Corinthians 3:3; Ephesians 4:1,2, 5:2; 1 John 2:6.

There are several preliminary observations to be made in approaching the message in John 13.

Firstly, the end of John chapter 12 sees the close of the Lord's public ministry. From then onward, He is with His own; and so it is with them that we find Him when we come to chapter 13.

Secondly, chapters 11 and 12 having brought right to the fore the whole matter of death and resurrection, as seen in Lazarus and the grain of wheat, chapter 13 indicates what is to obtain on resurrection and ascension ground, because everything is being dealt with here and onward from that standpoint - Christ risen and returning to the Father (vs. 1).

Thirdly, everything is now inward and not outward. So far, it has all been objective; every incident through all these

chapters has been in an outward way. From now on it is inward, it is subjective.

Fourthly, it is no longer only individual; it is now corporate.

These four things must be recognized in order to arrive at the full meaning and value of what follows. Thus it is a matter of what the Church is in itself, as on resurrection and ascension ground, for it is the Church which is now represented. Judas is going; Christ is being left alone with those who are to be the nucleus of the Church, and it all becomes a matter of what the Church is in itself, as viewed from the standpoint of Christ's resurrection and ascension, and its union with Him.

He is about to depart out of the world. All things have been given into His hands, and He is seeking to secure the inward ground which will lead to the fulfillment of the Church's one comprehensive purpose - the continuation of Himself in representation on this earth, the _expression of Himself here. He is going, but He is seeking to secure the continuity, the continuation, of Himself here as in His Church. And so, about to depart, He says that He leaves them an example, and when we come to analyze the example, we find that it is something which reaches right down into the innermost motives of the heart - Christ cannot be followed in just an outward way; that is proved. He has to be followed in an inward way.

So, having laid that foundation, we can come to the inclusive message of chapter 13.

The Immense Importance and Power of Meekness

That which arises is the immense importance and power of meekness. Perhaps it has not been sufficiently recognized that the fulfillment by the Church of its great vocation rests and depends upon its meekness. It has a tremendous business on hand, and it has immense forces against it. There is no doubt that the calling of the Church is a very great thing indeed, fraught with unspeakably great issues, and opposed by terrific forces; and to meet all that - the purpose, the vocation, and all the forces of evil - the one basic essential is meekness: because, in the first place, before the Church can get on with its work here in this world it must be in a position where Satan has no ground. Resurrection and ascension imply that; they just carry that with them. Resurrection and ascension mean that the entire ground of Satan has been set aside. The Lord Jesus has gone up on high because He has triumphed. So I repeat that resurrection and ascension just imply that Satan's power and authority have been destroyed and all things are in Christ's hands, not Satan's.

Meekness Destroys the Ground of Satan's Authority

The Church must come on to that ground, and we find so impressively - and it is most impressive - that the very first thing introduced on that ground is perhaps the last thing that we would have thought we should meet. When we come on to resurrection and ascension ground, on to the ground of Christ's great triumph and exaltation, we meet meekness, and meekness means that Satan's ground is destroyed, for Satan's fall was due to pride being found in his heart, and man's fall was because he let in that same pride. Pride - to have everything in himself, to be as God, to be himself the seat of knowledge. "Ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.", (Gen. 3:5). Wherever there is pride, Satan has the ground that he wants for destroying and wrecking, and the risen Lord is providing ground against that by this tremendous object-lesson as to meekness. Yes, Satan, sinister, powerful and terrible as he is, can often be completely nullified by a spirit of meekness, his whole ground can be taken from him by a spirit of meekness. The importance and power of meekness is seen, then, firstly in that it destroys the very ground of Satan's authority.

Meekness the Great Unifying Factor

Then it is seen as the great unifying factor. Judas, the disintegrating factor, has been compelled to withdraw. Satan is going to do his utmost to scatter, divide and disintegrate this band. In view of all that, the Lord, by His example, His acted sermon, is saying, "For the unifying of the Church, the integrating of the Church, the establishing of the Church as something which cannot be broken up or divided spiritually, the one essential is meekness." "I beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness.", (Eph. 4:1,2). The message to the Church at Philippi was because of disunity, and the Lord's meekness in self-emptying and humiliation and bond-servant form, His great condescension, is introduced by the Apostle as the ground of the Church's salvation at Philippi. The unifying factor is meekness. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.", (Phil. 2:5).

If we did but know it, a very great deal of the strain that is known by the Lord's people collectively, the postponement of full blessing, the delay in fulfillment of essential purpose, the distress and the heartbreak and the bewilderment, is due to

secret pride. The Lord sees it - unwillingness to let go somewhere, unwillingness to acknowledge somewhere, unwillingness to come down from some position taken as to our rightness. Yes, there is a lot of painful history of that kind, if we did but know it; it can be traced to pride, hidden pride; and the Lord says that the counter to that - to all that delay and postponement, to that arrest, to that threat of the complete disintegration of the Lord's people - is meekness. If that is true, we are right in saying that it is of immense importance and power. None would say that, during the three years with the Master, the Twelve, or even the Eleven, were a unity, and so much was due to rivalry, jealousy, personal interests. These are features of pride.

Meekness the Hallmark of Love

But then there is another thing which comes out here. It is that meekness is the hallmark of love. You know that John's Gospel can be divided into three sections, under three words - Life, Light and Love, and the love section begins at verse 34 of the thirteenth chapter. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." But meekness is the hallmark of love. Pride and love can never go together. Love and meekness will always be found together if the love is genuine. If the example is to be taken account of - if the Lord Jesus is the great example of love - the argument is just overwhelming. "Having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end And... he took a towel.", (vs. 1,13).

He loved; we have no doubt about His love, and that He is the supreme example of love. He is equally the supreme example of meekness. These two go together. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter." What an afterward! This Gospel is being written in the afterward. How does it begin? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and THE WORD WAS GOD. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made." "And he took a towel, and girded himself."

These disciples really had not grasped the magnitude of the Person who was in their midst. From time to time it came home to them with some force, and they felt that He was more than man. But it had not yet come home to them in fullness who He was, and it never did until after His resurrection and ascension. When, forty days after His resurrection, He was received up into heaven, and the mighty Holy Spirit came forth into them, then, and then only - but then - they knew in fullness who He was. It overwhelmed them.

And then they had a retrospective contemplation. "God, very God, who made all things, the Creator of the universe, has been down here and washed our feet!" That is tremendous, is it not? They knew afterward what had happened, they knew afterward the greatness of the condescension of God in the Person of Jesus Christ, and that did have an effect; it was a mighty power in their lives. They may not see eye to eye on all matters. The work in them was not immediately perfected, so that they were in perfect agreement in all interpretations. Peter and Paul may represent different standpoints, and at one time they may clash. Ah, but there is something deeper than that. Peter will say: "Our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you.", (2 Pet. 3:15). Something deep down has been wrought, and you find them very meek men, and, by their meekness, pillars of the Church. It is significant that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, dealing with divisions, he said: "The trouble is with your feet" - "Ye... walk after the manner of men.", (1 Cor. 3:3). John says, "You must walk as He walked": "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked.", (1 John 2:6); not walk as men. It is all here symbolized in the feet being cleansed.

The Walk of the Believer

We can pass now from that to the next thing. The Church's walk in this world is the link. We have read all those passages about the feet and the walk. We are able to see what a large place the walk has in the spiritual life. The Lord Jesus says something very strong about this. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."; "that depends upon your walk, upon your feet." What does He mean? Well, after all, this washing of feet was the neutralizing of the "earth touch", the contact with the earth - that which lies under the curse, which God can never accept, that which is completely contrary to God's mind. We have to be here, we have to walk here; but we have to have a great sensitiveness to the dust, a great sensitiveness to dirt.

Some people can bear a lot of dirt without being bothered by it! They are not very sensitive in this matter, and so they are not found washing very much. There are other people who are very sensitive to the slightest touch of dirt, because they know the danger of contamination. The surgeon is extremely sensitive to dirt; you will constantly see him laboriously "washing up." The ordinary person would ask whether all this is quite necessary: is this not overdoing it a bit? There he stands; he goes on scrubbing and washing, rinsing and washing again and scrubbing. But he knows the infinite peril of dirt

, of contact with a world that is impregnated with dangerous elements, with another life that is harmful; and he is sensitive to that. The Lord Jesus was extremely sensitive, and He must have suffered terribly, walking, in His sinlessness, on this earth. Here in this chapter He is only saying in a pictorial way, "You must have a great sensitiveness to the death touch, to the earth touch."

That will work out in many ways. It will work out as to our conversation. If you and I are really spiritual, really growing in the spiritual life, we shall have violent reactions to our own talk. It will touch us, too, in what we read. It will touch us in all sorts of ways. The point is that there has to be sensitiveness to that which belongs to the realm on the other side of that Cross, the realm to which we are supposed to have died, and which has nothing in common with this realm of "walking in newness of life"; yes, a growing sensitiveness, that means pain when there is anything present which the Lord does not accept or agree with. If the Church is going to fulfill its vocation, if the Church is going to be here with the impact of the risen, ascended Lord, it has to be very, very sensitive to what is against the Spirit. And, of course, this has to be true of the individuals who make up the Church.

We have, therefore, little difficulty in seeing why the Church has so little influence and power and effect. It has become so contaminated, and it has lost its sensitiveness to spiritual things. It can allow so much that, from God's standpoint, was put out when the Lord Jesus died. Go back to Aaron and his sons, the priests, and the laver between the altar and the tabernacle, the tent of meeting. "Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat... THAT THEY DIE NOT.", (Ex. 30:19). They have to get rid of the death touch - of the earth touch which is the death touch. So the blood was placed on the great toe of the right foot, indicating the whole walk of the servants of God. I think it is unnecessary for us to go further than that. I only call you back to that selection of passages at the head of this chapter, and there are many more about the walk of the believer.

And there is that great inclusive word to the Colossians: "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.", (Col. 3:1-3). There is the great divide of the Cross between earth and heaven. Union with the risen, ascended Lord does mean that there is set up inside the believer, and inside the Church when it is according to the Lord's mind, a faculty for discerning and perceiving what is and what is not of the Lord; what belongs to this new realm and what does not belong to it; and the development of that faculty is the way of the Church's increasing spiritual life and power, as it is of the individual's.

The Washing of One Another's Feet

Then, finally, as to this matter of feet-washing. "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet." We do not take this literally; we know that the whole thing here is symbolical. But there it is something that we ought to do. "We also ought to wash one another's feet." What does it mean?

It is a picture again. "Brethren... if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted.", (Gal. 6:1). It is the spirit of meekness helping the one who has become touched, tainted, or overtaken in the way. This one is in the way, and there creeps up something to corrupt or pollute, and overtakes him; his feet are caught. Now, "ye which are spiritual", wash his feet, help him out of that, help him to get free. I think we more often point out the dirt than wash it off. We are far more ready to criticize our brother for his fault or faults than to set ourselves to help him to get rid of them. Washing of the feet surely does just mean making it our humble business, in all lowliness and meekness, knowing our own frailty and weakness, to help to remove that which we see as a defect, a fault, a wrong, an evil, in our brother.

Well, that covers a lot of ground, and I am not going to stay longer with this matter of feet-washing, but it is something that the Lord has said is to be a ministry in the Church, if the Church is to be kept in purity; something that we have to do. It is what Paul calls "Speaking the truth in love.", (Eph. 4:15) - in love being faithful with one another. That is feet-washing. It may sometimes be hot water, it may sometimes need a little caustic - but the balm of love must be there.

Have we established our statement as to the immense importance and power of meekness? If I were to go back and underline anything that has been said, I think I should underline mainly that part about spiritual sensitiveness to the touch of that which has in it the power of death and disintegration. It comes so subtly, just a suggestion. We have only to hint at something about a fellow-believer, about another Christian, and it becomes something which works and grows. The enemy just looks for the slightest thing like that, to build it up, and before long that which was only a hint or a suggestion about them has involved their whole life in a black cloud, and they become suspect and wholly unclean, and you begin to avoid them. It is only one of the many ways in which you and I are called upon to be sensitive to dust, to dirt. We are movin

g in a very unclean world, naturally and spiritually. It is so easy for us to be affected, and we must have this sensitiveness to dirt to get rid of it in order to maintain a healthy living body.

One of the books which perhaps has, by way of illustration, helped me most in this whole realm of spiritual sensitiveness, is *The Life of Lord Lister*. It is the story of the man who was largely responsible for that whole science of antiseptics, the great warfare against the deadly microbe. What a story it is! And the story opens with the battle that he had to wage, and what a battle was waged against him! You could hardly imagine a surgeon coming in to perform a major operation in an old dirty coat that he had been wearing doing all sorts of other things, then going from that operation, with all its blood on him, to perform another one, and so on. We are not surprised that the hospitals themselves were scenes of more mortality than the outside world. What a battle! His whole theory was laughed at, scorned, ridiculed. He had to fight this battle through, but it was won.

We know today the importance of washing. The Lord Jesus knew all about it; they did not know. This greater than Lister knew all about that counterpart, that antitype, of contamination, when He, coming into a universe impregnated with these evil germs working death and havoc, said, "We must wash up before we touch anything." So He said to the Church, as the first thing upon a resurrection-ascension basis: "Let us get down to wash the point of contact with this world, and break that contact, get clean and clear of it." Our whole vocation and testimony hangs upon that.

We Beheld His Glory - Volume Two - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/6/20 13:31

Chapter 4 - The Troubled Heart

Reading: John 14

It is important, for obtaining the full value of the content of this chapter, that we recognize that the opening words throw back to and link up with what has preceded. Really, the narrative ought not to be broken into at this point. The link should be with verses 33-35 of chapter 13. There the Lord had said some most disturbing things, especially disturbing to men who had such a different "Messianic" mentality as to the "Kingdom." He said: "Little children, I am with you for only a little while longer. You will look for Me and I shall be gone. Moreover, for the time being, you will not be able to come where I am."

Then, to Simon Peter's protestation, He spoke of the terrible breakdown which would so soon overshadow all Peter's self-confidence. Surely both of these things called for some words of reassurance that this was not the end of everything. How unstable and insecure everything seemed to be! The ground beneath their feet was giving way like quicksand. There was good reason for their hearts to be troubled. And then - straight on without a break - "Let not your heart be troubled", followed by the statement that there are "abiding-places" in the Father's House. The emphasis is upon "abiding." These words of Christ are commonly regarded as relating to the more or less distant future when He shall "come again and receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also." That is undoubtedly true, and has in it the comfort which He intended it to have. But is that the whole truth? Is this not in keeping with the whole spiritual teaching of John's Gospel? We have seen in every chapter that Jesus was speaking and acting on spiritual principles, and while we do not desire to spiritualize practical or temporal values out of existence, it is difficult to conclude that this section is essentially different from all that precedes and follows. Hence, we are bound to make room here for all that really did happen afterward and that has obtained during the many centuries since these words were spoken.

Indeed, this Gospel of John is all of one piece, and what we call chapter 14 is but the enlargement of the principle, introduced with the feet-washing as a symbolic setting, in the words: "...his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father."

"In my Father's house are many abiding-places."

So what is introduced here is:

(1) Christ in Heaven

The grand and all-governing feature of this dispensation is that Christ is in Heaven.

All the purposes and activities of God in this dispensation are related to that fact.

All government is vested in Christ in Heaven. The headquarters of the Church are in Heaven - it has none on earth; neither

her in Jerusalem, Rome, nor anywhere else. There can be no center or centralizing of God's work in any earthly place. Everything has to be referred to Heaven, and derived from Heaven.

The world is the place of man's glory; Heaven is the place of Christ's glory. The earth is the place of Christ's emptying; Heaven that of His filling. The earth sees His humiliation; Heaven sees His exaltation. The earth is the scene of His journeys with no place to lay His head. Heaven sees Him entered into His rest: He "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." The earth is the realm of Satan's kingdom, Judas being the link (13:2): Heaven is the place of Christ's throne, from which He overrules Satan's kingdom.

And so the comparisons and contrasts can go on, but the inclusive truth is that in Christ in Heaven everything is centered for the believer's and the Church's life, rest, power, direction, government, confidence, and fullness.

That is the explanation of everything in the Book of the Acts from chapter 2 and onward.

But it leads to the counterpart of that, namely

(2) The Church in Heaven

In this chapter everything is future. "In that day", is a phrase which stands over a long section of several chapters. So we see that the Church (everything now being corporate) is not at this point in Heaven, but the day is seen when it will be. John, in the Revelation, sees it there literally at last, but between the position in his Gospel and that at the end of the Revelation all of Paul's ministry has its place. Whatever may be either literal or symbolical, it is all based upon what is spiritual. For instance, "going to Heaven" requires spiritual, heavenly birth, citizenship, life, nature, walk, and conformity. Paul it is who brings in this counterpart, but the Holy Spirit is one in both and they are complementary.

The explanation of John's recorded words of Christ about the Father's House and the "abiding (or resting) places" is found in Paul's words in his Ephesian letter: "quickened... raised... seated us together with him in the heavenly places." We are regarded as being there now. The "that day" has come. It is the "day" after the Cross. Resurrection, Ascension, and the Spirit's descent. This is the full result of what we have seen as to chapter 13.

Enlightenment as to the Way

Jesus said: "Ye know the way." They said: "We know not the way." But Jesus had only just said: "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow afterwards", (13:36). This all seems very confusing. Jesus must have been speaking mysteriously, parabolically! He must have been laboring under a definite handicap, some real disadvantage, because of a basic deficiency in them. There are therefore two things to note here.

"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven." "Thou canst not follow... now."

And "Ye know", "Thou shalt..."

Upon what did their knowing rest initially? It rested upon their having come into touch with Him! "I am the way." But this knowledge is shown to be twofold.

(1) Personal association with Christ - Present

(2) The Holy Spirit's inward revelation of Christ - Progressive

John's whole Gospel is based upon, or composed of, personal and actual contact with Christ, and an upshot from that. That upshot is that He is acknowledged to be the Son of the Living God. "Thou art the Christ..."

Paul's ministry is based upon: "It pleased God... to reveal his Son in me." "Christ in you."

But the experience and teaching of both John and Paul are based upon a common foundation: the "cannot" of the flesh, the "natural man"; the need to become "spiritual" men, i.e. men of the Spirit; and between these the experience of the Cross. On one side the Cross says "No!" on the other side it says "Yes!" "Thou canst not" - "Thou shalt." How true that was proved to be of the self-confident, self-assured, self-sufficient Simon Peter of 13:37! - but, on the other side of the Cross, how true was the "Thou shalt," the great "afterward." That selfhood was Satan's ground, and it had to be broken. Peter, t

he restless, feverish, troubled, variable, fretful, questioning, disputing, impulsive, and denying, was emptied out by the Cross. Subsequently, as under the mastery of the Spirit, he entered into heavenly rest, assurance, certainty, persistence, and courage. He followed through, and whatever the Father's House meant for him ultimately, he came, in this life, to the place of "abiding"; to the spiritual meaning of that House. This is abundantly clear from his letters.

Peter's own abiding resulted from Christ coming to abide in him, to go no more away: "with you for ever" (14:16). This will be more fully considered in the next two chapters.

This is the ground and assurance of "peace" (27). If we are entangled with ourselves, we have no peace. If we are entangled with the world, we have no peace. Only the disentangled can have peace; and death with Christ does the disentangling, and resurrection with Christ leads to a life above the world and above ourselves.

This chapter, John 14, really gathers around one word - a Greek word denoting: to stay, remain, abide, continue, endure, be permanent. It occurs in verse 2 - "abiding-places"; verse 10 - "the Father abiding in me"; verse 17 - the Holy Spirit will abide in them; verse 23 - the Godhead: "we will make our abode with" believers.

This stands over against:

The treachery of Judas; the shadow of the Cross; the imminent departure of Christ; the inability to follow Him; the questions arising "How?"

It is an amazing thing to realize that all this perplexity, uncertainty, bafflement, apprehension, is the doorway to the greatest rest: the rest of knowing, of certainty, of finality. This is indicated as being all bound up with a spiritual union with Christ in Heaven - stronger, deeper, and more abiding than any earthly, temporal, physical, sentient association could ever be. Those who know Him after the Spirit know how superior this knowledge is to any other kind of knowing, for by it their hearts have become untroubled as to eventualities; they are at rest.

There are heart troubles and heart cries here. Jesus has undercut all self-confidence and assurance as to man's ability to go through a severe test of faithfulness. He has practically undercut men's confidence in an earthly relationship with Himself. He has raised the tremendous question and mystery of the life beyond this: Where? How? What? What is the answer? How can we come to absolute rest and assurance? The inclusive answer is: "I am."

Really to know Him as He can be known after the Resurrection answers all questions, settles all doubts, and silences all troubles as to ourselves, our way and our end.

Re: We Beheld His Glory - Volume Two - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/6/23 18:54

Chapter 5 - The Glory of Christ the Vine

Reading: John 15

Considering the subject of this part of our Lord's discourse on the way from the upper room to the Cross, we have to bring into the foreground the governing object of all these discourses, and indeed of all that is reported and recorded in this Gospel. It is an object that is seen in a peculiar way to govern the early part of this chapter - the discourse on the vine. Before we can understand all the rest - everything that the Lord is saying here - we must see the object for which the vine exists. That object is clearly shown to be nothing less than the glory, pleasure, and satisfaction of God.

We have previously defined the glory of God as being His Divine nature satisfied in seeing His purposes realized: His very nature in its peculiar requirements satisfied - satisfied in the realization of its objects. But we must not just take that as a definition or a statement in words; we must feel it. It is the very being of God - what He is in His nature - finding an answer in kind, as embodied in purposes of His heart. When there is a correspondence between God and the object - the sentient object - of His work, there is a sense of glory; it may express itself in worship, joy, rest, gratification, a burst of praise. But this is something rather to feel than to grasp mentally.

Thus, it is the glory or the glorifying of the Father for which the vine corporately exists. He is glorified in that which is the fruit or issue of the existence of the vine. So we let the glory of God interpret every statement of the Lord Jesus in this remarkable, wonderful discourse. We cannot just now go through the whole, sentence by sentence, statement by statement. But if we take this matter of God requiring to be satisfied in His nature, and bring it alongside of each utterance of the Lord Jesus throughout this discourse, it will explain everything. It will even solve some of those long-standing problems

which this chapter holds. For the moment we must confine ourselves to the statement that the governing object of the existence of the vine is the glory, or the glorifying of God: that is to say, His satisfaction in the realization of His purposes.

Christ the True Vine

Having established that, we proceed to consider the way to that object, the way to the glorifying of God, as it is revealed in this chapter. As we should expect, right at the very beginning we are confronted with His Son, and the first thing we meet here is a statement which signifies the exclusiveness and uniqueness of the Son of the Father. In words of comparison and contrast, He begins, almost abruptly, it would seem: for, rising from the supper and the upper room, and saying, "Let us go hence", He just proceeds. It sounds almost an abrupt continuation. But there is no interruption; He just goes on talking. "I am the true vine." "I" and "true" are words of comparison and contrast. They follow in the line of many such things already said. "I am the good shepherd", (John 10:14); that is comparison and contrast. It is invidious. "My Father giveth you the true bread out of heaven" (John 6:32).

This comparison of the vine is, of course, with Israel who was the Lord's vine. He "brought a vine out of Egypt", (Psa. 80:8), but that vine failed to produce the fruit for the glory of God; that is, the satisfaction of God's nature in the realization of His purpose. It proved a false vine - false to the Father's nature, false to the Father's expectations, false to the Father's purposes; still remaining in the earth for the time, still in a way growing, developing, making a show, making a profession, but now set aside as a false thing, in no way corresponding to the intention of God in its existence.

The Son says: "I am the true vine." What He is saying is that everything now for God's satisfaction, for the satisfaction of the Father's nature in the realization of His purposes, is centered in the Father's Son; everything now is summed up in the Son. "I am." When we gather together all those "I am's" of this Gospel, how many there are of them, and how tremendously emphatic they are, even in the language itself. The "I" is emphatic. If we had heard the Lord say it, in familiarity with the language used, we should have heard the emphasis there: "I am the true vine." So, everywhere in this Gospel, He brings things away from all other connections, centers them in Himself, and says: "Everything now of God's expectation, God's purpose, God's satisfaction, and therefore God's glory, is centered in His Son." "I am." As I said just now, that is what we should expect, when we are looking for God's satisfaction and God's realization of heart-purpose. It is in His Son we know that so well.

The Branches

But then a wonderful thing about that - about the glory of God, the satisfaction of God in realized purposes - is carried by the next statement. "Ye are...", "I am the vine, ye are the branches", (vs. 5), and in between "my Father", (vs. 1). We must always keep the terms clearly before us: the husbandry is that of the Father; this has come as from a Father. It is something begotten of God, something born of God; something with which He, as Father, is bound up in a heart-relationship, for which He is jealous with the jealousy of a Father. This is not just a proprietor, an owner. This is something of an inward relatedness, not merely outward. The Father's heart is bound up with this. It is pre-eminently a matter of love.

Identity of Life

"Ye are the branches." In this statement there is at once struck the note which is fundamental to the whole New Testament revelation: the note of identity of life. What a dominant matter that is in the New Testament, as well as in our own experience! Of course, we are now able to read into this the so much greater revelation which came afterward as to its meaning, that of which this was but an illustration. We "know it all" now; it is one of the most familiar truths to us; and yet it is the matter upon which the Father is concentrating every day of our lives, and it is the matter which gives rise to by far the greater measure of our troubles and difficulties.

There is not an adhesion to Christ; there is not a "coming to" Him. There is a sense in which we come to Him, in the sense of His words "Come unto me", (Matt. 11:28); or else "ye will not come to me", (John 5:40); but no one would ever say, in the light of the New Testament, that coming to the Lord Jesus makes us an organic part of Him. We need all those other illustrations that are in the New Testament really to express this, e.g. "planted together", "born anew", "buried-raised with Christ", and so on. We do not just come as people, and range ourselves at the side of a certain One, and then go on together. That is not the teaching of the New Testament. We come to Him and then are plunged into His grave, and out of that grave we do not rise in our old life, separate and different. "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me.", (Gal. 2:20).

Now we are familiar with that truth, but that is what the Lord here lays down as the essential and indispensable basis of

any satisfaction to the Father and realization of His purpose. It is basic to that; for only the Son can satisfy the Father, and only in the Son can the Father's purposes be realized. Therefore, if that is to be in any way fulfilled through a corporate instrument, there must be an absolute identity of life. We know now how that takes place: whatever there is going to be will not be from us - it will be from Him.

But I do want specially to underline that point, that it is not our coming unto Him that has this result; it is what arises from His life within. It is the rising out from, and not the coming unto, that makes all the difference. We can adhere, we can sponsor, we can attach, we can take up a position; we can "come just as we are" and go on just as we are. We can still be in a kind of relatedness to the Lord which does not bring with it any rising out from the Lord, and it makes all the difference to what kind of life ours is going to be in the matter of God's glory. That is what the Lord is saying here, in more words. He is pointing out that there can be a kind of relatedness to Himself which does not bear this fruit to the Father's satisfaction and glory; something somewhere is lacking. Whatever the function of the branches - and that function is to bear the fruit of the vine - they can do nothing in that matter apart from this identity of life. This is a deep inward oneness with the Lord, which is not two things, but is only one thing; and that one thing is the Lord Jesus as the life.

The whole teaching of the New Testament is that union with Christ implies the end of any separateness of existence as apart from or other than Christ Himself. It is existence now as from a birth, not from an attachment; from a life imparted which has never before been possessed. It is something quite new, quite fresh, quite other than there was hitherto. That is the uniqueness and exclusiveness of Christ. So the branches become a part of something unique, something different from all that we know of mankind and creation, something that has not been before.

The Purpose of the Vine's Existence

We come now to this matter of fruit, and we note that, so far as the glory of God is concerned, it is a governing matter. It is impressive that the Lord should have chosen the vine as the symbol of this means of reaching His end. You know so well that a vine has no other use in all the world but to bear fruit. It has no by-products. There are some things from which, if the main object is realized or even has failed, you can get other things, byproducts; there are secondary uses. But you cannot even make a walking-stick out of a vine. If it does not bear fruit, it is good for nothing. There is no other purpose to which you can turn a vine except to make a bonfire of it.

The whole object of the existence of Christ and His members is this matter of fruit. The Lord expresses Himself here in strong terms. If fruit is not forthcoming, He says, such branches are cast out, gathered, thrown on the fire, burned. Men do not say, Oh, well, it is not bearing any fruit, but we can turn it to this use and to that, we can make it serve some purpose. There is no alternative for a vine. And there is no alternative for your life and mine, in relation to Christ, but the glory of God. God has no secondary purposes for us, saying, Oh, well, they are not bearing any fruit - we will make some other use of them. No: the glory of God in satisfaction, in the realization of His purpose - His purpose - is the only justification for our existence in relation to Christ.

That is precisely the reason why Israel was cast off and burned. An old doctrinal or theological question arises here; but I am not going to follow that out. Is Israel in the fire? Have men cast Israel into the fire, since God cast Israel off? Well, we know the answer to that. But, leaving that aside for the moment, you see the point: it is that, with God, this vine is only justified in having an existence in the satisfaction of His nature and in the fulfillment of His purposes. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."

Fruit the Evidence of Life

And it is the fruit which is the evidence of the life. That is what the Lord comes down upon. He does not say that branches and leaves justify the existence or prove anything. It is the fruit which proves everything and it is the fruit which proves the life. He fastens upon that: the fruit proves the life. And Christ's life is essentially fruitful. An unfruitful Christian is a contradiction of Christ, a contradiction of the life of Christ. Christ did not have to make efforts to be fruitful; there was no effort in His fruitfulness. It was spontaneous. The life itself is spontaneously, inevitably fruitful.

Was it not just there that Mr. Hudson Taylor came to his life crisis, when, after years, he was brought to a complete standstill on this question of fruitfulness? The whole crisis turned upon his struggling, his agonizing, his taking the strain and burden of this matter of fruitfulness, until he fretted himself into despair. And then he came upon this chapter of John's Gospel, and the Lord, so to speak, stood by him and opened it up to him, and showed him that He was the life of the vine, and the branches had to do nothing by way of struggle to bear fruit. All they had to do was to let the life have its way unhindered. It came as a revelation to him; you have it in that great chapter in his autobiography, "The Exchanged Life." If th

the life of the Lord is not frustrated, is not hindered, or, to use the Lord's word here and its reiteration, if we abide in Him, that is, keep on Christ's ground and do not take our own or any other ground, the life proves itself spontaneously in fruitfulness without any effort.

The Bearing of Fruit Is Service

And inasmuch as this fruit-bearing is the service which is rendered to God and includes all that is meant by Christian service, the service of the Lord; inasmuch as the fruitbearing is the service of the believer and the Church: then it is quite clear here that service and union with Christ the right kind of union with Christ, the kind that we have mentioned are the same thing. It is a union that means identity of life through losing our own and having His yielding up our apartness, our independent life, and taking His. That union is spontaneously service.

We have thought of the service of God as a matter of preaching and teaching and doing a multitude of things for the Lord. They may only be the framework; they may only be the outer casing, like the bark of a tree. The Lord may pour His life through such methods and means, or He may not let us do any preaching or teaching. In the case of some, He may have the greatest measure of fruit without ever any preaching being done at all. Fruit is the spontaneous expression of a deep-rooted oneness with Christ, and there may be very much satisfaction and glory to God through people who are never allowed to preach or teach or do any of those things which we call Christian work. But to express Christ, to live Christ, to manifest Christ, to let everything around feel Christ and be touched by Christ through our presence - that certainly is to the glory of God and the satisfaction of His heart, and that is service.

For what is this fruit? It is the life of Christ manifested, and God help both the preachers and the teachers and the workers, and those to whom they preach, if there is not a manifestation of Christ coming through what they are saying and doing. The real heart of it is this deep union of life with the Lord, and it is this kind of service which satisfies God.

The Pruning Knife

"Every branch that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it", or "purgeth it": by which we understand Him to mean that He is pruning, and there are one or two things which we must conclude from this procedure of the Lord. He does not say that if a branch bears no fruit, He prunes it to bear fruit - no, He cuts that off; but if it bears some fruit, He "cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit." The point here is that, for the Father's full satisfaction, it is not merely size that weighs with Him, it is not just bigness, it is not the expansiveness of the branches. The thing which counts with the Father ultimately is the quality and amount of fruit - in other words, the measure of Christ, the essential qualities of Christ. Other metaphors or figures like the "Body of Christ" pre-eminently, will be used in the later New Testament to set forth this principle, but here it is the measure of Christ that the Father is seeking.

We can press that even more closely. Even in that which comes from the Lord - for the fruit comes from the Lord; it is the expression of His life - even in that very vine, the Lord takes measures of curtailment in order to get intrinsic values. Paul and the churches might well have thought that it would be of far more value to God if he had been kept at liberty, kept free to travel about over the world and meet the saints; but God's pruning knife decided that it would be of greater intrinsic value if Paul's liberty were curtailed and he were put in prison. We know the wisdom of God in that now. Thank God for what came out of that prison in those letters - intrinsic value indeed! Sometimes the wisdom and the love of God operate in what looks like limitation, in certain ways and certain directions, in order to get intrinsic value. A seed-plot is an intensive thing, not necessarily an expansive thing; but it may be that presently the whole world will be sown from that seed-plot: that plant or that crop will be reproduced everywhere. And the Lord is saying here, "I am not first of all interested in how big and expansive you are, in what you are doing, even though it may be for Me, and even though it may be, in measure, by the life which I have given you. What I am primarily concerned about is the richness of the fruit, the quality of the fruit and the real measure of intrinsic value." You can have grapes and grapes, and the Lord is after the first quality. It means that there is a good deal of saying "No" when that life is at work. Here are these branches spreading, and the knife says, "No, not that, not that, not that." The pruning knife is a great instrument for God's "No" - but it is governed by God's "Yes." The "Yes" lies hidden behind. The "Yes" relates to the quality and the intrinsic value of the fruit, the measure of Divine satisfaction, and it is that which governs the "No," which lops off.

The Object of the Pruning

Finally, the work of the Husbandman, the Father, with His pruning knife, has as its object the preserving of true character. That is true in all pruning, as you know. You go along the path there in the garden. You will see some grafted rose bushes which once bore beautiful roses. They were not pruned. Now they have run wild: the wild stocks have been allowed

to supplant the beautiful grafted forms, and they are only bearing what we call dog-roses. They may be pretty, but we know that the plant has run wild for want of the knife. The result is not the real thing - it is a wild thing; it is something inferior, it is not what it might have been. It is so easy for us, if the Lord spares the knife and leaves us alone, to lose distinctive character. Just let us get out of the Lord and run free, take our own way for a bit, and we lose distinctiveness of character. There is a wildness, a foreign element that comes in, and the real pleasure of the Lord is lost. It is not until that knife comes back and does some pretty hard work, saying, "No, no, not that way, not that way", that the Lord recovers the thing which He first intended as His own satisfaction. But what is the result? "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." We have to admit, after all, that it was not in that independent way that we really found our joy; our joy is being in the way of the Lord's first appointment and choice, and our joy is restored very often by the knife. "That my joy may be in you."

If you go to Hebrews 12, you will see the fuller interpretation and explanation. It is the Father's hand that is upon us to get that which, firstly, justifies our existence - the satisfaction of His nature, the fulfillment of His purpose - and in so doing brings His joy into our hearts. It is not our joy in the first place, but His. Then our joy is His joy - and our joy is fulfilled.

Re: We Beheld His Glory - Volume Two - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/6/26 12:54

Chapter 6

With the phase of John's revelation of spiritual truth that is marked, in our arrangement, by the beginning of Chapter 16, we are presented with an immense development. It is nothing less than the grand turning point in the dispensations. There is here coming into view another dispensation, with its own particular and peculiar nature; an altogether new economy is about to be inaugurated. It is

The Dispensation of the Spirit

For many centuries the Law had reigned. Then came the brief interlude of the Incarnation, in which as to the past - for the first and only time, the Law had its perfect fulfillment in a Man, and - as to the future - the new reign of the Spirit also in a Man was exemplified.

Now, the "going" of that One to the Father is shown to be imminent. It is also shown to be essential in order that all in Him through faith should move on to that new basis.

There are one or two things in this part of the Lord's discourse which had a point and edge that startled those who heard them, and which need to be recovered from the blunting effect of familiarity and tradition where we are concerned. That the invisible should be of value far transcending the visible, that the intangible should transcend the tangible, the inward the objective, the inaudible the audible, was by no means a simple thing to believe. That this chance was "expedient" was as far from easy to accept. To let go the personal, physical, present embodiment of all hope and expectations - all that He had come to mean to them - for One who seemed so impersonal, incomprehensible, and mysterious, was a change to be contemplated only with misgivings and fears.

And yet it was being categorically stated that the one was incomparably more important than the other - the Spirit than the Incarnate Christ as visibly present!

Then again, this was all being stated with such an air of assumption. It seemed to be assumed that the coming of the Spirit was a part of the course of things, and essential as the complement of Christ's work. In what ways would this be?

- (1) Christ's physical presence was outward and objective: The Holy Spirit would be within and subjective.
- (2) Christ physically would be limited to one place at a time, and by all the straitness of time and geography: The Holy Spirit would be immanent, omnipresent; with all, everywhere, at all times - or apart from time.
- (3) Christ physically must do His work and return to the Father: The Holy Spirit would "abide for ever" ("unto the age").
- (4) Christ came that in the body He might accomplish eternal redemption through the Cross: The Holy Spirit would make that work the basis and means of world-wide and continuous conviction as to man's need of it.
- (5) While the relationship of men to Jesus in the flesh remained, it would remain a matter of following and falteringly responding to commands and regulations imposed, with all the contradictions which did actually mark the three years with Him.

m: By the coming of the Holy Spirit to reside in them, they would become actually spiritual men, with the Spirit of Christ within.

The proof and evidence that this was right - this great and critical change-over from Christ in the flesh to the Holy Spirit - is seen abundantly in the transformation which took place in these same men with and from the Day of Pentecost. It is a very profitable thing to tabulate the points of difference in them before and after that event. Not only was that immediately so, but the progress spiritually was more in three months than it had been in three years; and so it continued.

This is the inclusive and fundamental difference between this dispensation and the earlier, and it is a challenge to us as to whether we have really entered into the distinctive nature of the dispensation in which we live, according to God's order. More on this later in another connection.

The next primary thing in this section of the discourse is

The Holy Spirit's Work in Relation to Christ

The Lord said that the Holy Spirit would make it His active business to work in relation to Himself Jesus Christ.

This work would be in two directions.

(1) As to themselves.

(2) As to the world.

(1) As to themselves, He would be to and in them the Spirit of revelation

It is positively affirmed that, as they were before, and without this definite gift and reception of the Spirit as an event, they were without the capacity or ability to receive and "bear" the much that Christ had to say to them. Let us note - "I have many things to say to you." Into that statement must be gathered all that they came to know in after years, much of which comprises our "New Testament." But even Apostles had to confess to being unable to say all that they wanted to because of the limited spirituality of believers.

What was true of the Disciples before Pentecost is true comparatively of believers always, according to the life in the Spirit.

Spiritual knowledge is not only the result of study, reason, deduction or information.

The Scriptures, or what the Lord has said and which is recorded for us, are essentially the Holy Spirit's basis and means of operation, but revelation as to what the Lord meant, and of the inexhaustible content of any Divine utterance, is a plus, an extra, whilst at the same time consistency with Divine principles is preserved.

The proof that the "eyes of the heart have been enlightened" is that the truth has become a power, a life, a revolution, not just a system of doctrine. Christ never violated any Scripture or Divine principle, and yet the mass of those who believed that they were the custodians of the truth firmly and fiercely believed that He did so. This stands to emphasize the fact that in the realm of Scripture there can be two positively opposed positions that of the men of the letter, and that of the men of the Word plus the Spirit.

While everyone will agree that the phrase "Spirit-taught men" expresses the need of all times, and that this is no contradiction to the teaching of Scripture, yet strangely enough, this marks a distinction which issues in the conflict referred to in John 15:18-26; 16:1-3.

It is here made unquestionably clear that persecution has its chief force in those who hold firmly to a traditional position as to their apprehension of Scripture, as against those who, having the same Bible, have had a mighty work of the Spirit of God done in them by which they have been introduced into a realm which, while not contradictory to the Word, yet holds the all-inclusive and overwhelming significance of Christ in God's universe. "These things will they do unto you because they have not known the Father, nor me."

That knowledge of the Father and the Son is a revelation of the Holy Spirit, without which we may be the fiercest protago

nists of Biblical tradition and yet like Saul of Tarsus be all wrong. So, when it comes to summing up the meaning of the new dispensation where believers are concerned, it amounts to this: "Have we really, by a definite work of the Holy Spirit within us, seen the significance and meaning of Christ in God's creational, redemptive, and consummate scheme of things?" If not, then there is an open door to every one of the unhappy conditions in Christendom. If so, we are on higher ground than all that is petty, personal, earthly, and cruel.

(2) As to the world, (verse 8)

The words of this statement are often quoted, but their inclusive meaning is often overlooked or missed.

Note - The focal point of the world-convicting work of the Spirit is Christ and His work.

(a) The Sin question

Note that it is not in the plural - sins.

The Holy Spirit may convict believers of sins, but He does not do this with the world.

The judgment of the world will not be on the basis of sins, greater or less, these or those. If that were so, it would be unjust. Some are - as General Booth put it - "damned into the world." That is from birth or before the most terrible forms of sin are their heritage. Others inherit and come into much more helpful and propitious conditions, which conduce to a more moral conduct. To condemn the one and be generous to the other would be totally unrighteous. God has His basis of judgment for both, and on it all are brought to a common level. The basis is: God sent His Son into the world to redeem the world, (John 3:17; Gal. 4:4,5).

What have you done with Him?

And: "Because they believe not on me."

The whole sin question is focused in acceptance or non-acceptance of Christ.

(b) The Righteousness question

"Because I go to the Father."

If Jesus was - while truly God - truly man, taking man's Place before God, representative and substitutionary, and eventually - as man - goes to the Father, then, seeing that no unrighteous man will ever be in the presence of the Father, the whole question of righteousness must have been settled in Him as Man for man. This is the vast subject of "Righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ"; but in our passage it is concisely stated that the Holy Spirit's convicting work will be on the basis of Jesus Christ the Righteous, and on no other ground of righteousness, more or less, whether ceremonial, claimed, professed, worked up, or striven after.

(c) The Judgment question

How wonderful are these simple though comprehensive formulae.

Here the tremendous field of judgment is covered in one concise phrase: "Because the prince of this world has been judged." What does that mean?

Well, in God's thought and intention there is only one prince for this world. But another, a false prince, a usurper, a rival, has gained a position of lordship, and this by man's assent or acceptance.

"The whole world lieth in the wicked one."

But in the Cross of Christ this other has been judged, condemned, and "cast out." By that Cross his casting out of Heaven has been followed by his casting out of the earth - in the thought and rights of God for His Son.

From the day of the Spirit, when Jesus began to be preached as "Lord", "prince and Saviour" (the great Apostolic theme)

, judgment is gathered into the matter of a deliberate choice of sides. In Christ judgment has been finished. "Out of Christ" means "in Satan": therefore in the realm of double judgment - exclusion both from God's kingdom here and from Heaven.

So judgment is solely a matter of taking sides, but it is Christ again who is the deciding Factor.

Thus the Spirit has as His ground the Person and work of Christ, in their respective meanings for the believer and the world.

This may be an added factor in that hostility to which the Lord so much referred at that time, and which was so satanically manifested after the Spirit had come.

But there is much comfort for believers in this chapter. The Spirit who was in the Lord Jesus is promised and given to all who will receive Him. All the possibilities and potentialities of His indwelling, for progressive and never-ending knowledge of Christ's fullness, and for service, are for those who will take the ground of the new dispensation - the ground of Christ's absolute Lordship, His perfected work and who live abidingly in and by the Spirit.

We Beheld His Glory - Volume Two - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/6/27 5:50

Chapter 7

That part of the gospel by John which we have now reached has come to be known under two titles: "The High Priestly Prayer" and "The Holy of Holies." We might well combine them and speak of John 17 as "The High Priest in the Holy of Holies." This chapter stands with the most sacred, beautiful, heart-searching, profound and awe-inspiring chapters of the whole Bible. There is no fathoming its depths or exhausting its fullness. Marcus Rainsford has written a book of 454 pages on this chapter alone, and yet we feel that he has only touched the surface. Certainly we can do no more here than seek to underline the main message and emphasize the essential challenge.

When we speak of this prayer as that of the High Priest in the Holy of Holies we are not altogether right. What we mean is that we are allowed to hear the innermost converse between the Son and His Father; the most sacred and intimate breathings of His heart in the most solemn communion of the nearest place to God. But as to the actual position occupied at that moment, He had not yet reached the Holy of Holies, for the sacrifice had not yet been offered, nor the blood shed. We should therefore be more correct to refer to this as

The Prayer Beside the Altar

Christ had already taken the place of the Jewish Feasts, the Temple, the Vine, etc. Now here He takes the place of the High Priest. He is about to offer the Whole Burnt Offering, wholly and utterly set apart to God ("consecrated," vs. 19). He will seal His intercession with His own Blood.

The predominating words in any given part of the Bible always notify and indicate the immediate subject or message. It is not difficult, indeed it is very easy, to recognize such words here. They distinctly denote three things.

(1) The glory of the Father and the Son, and that glory imparted to the disciples: verses 1, 5, 10, 22, 24.

(2) The oneness of the Father and the Son; of the disciples and the Son and the Father; and of the disciples themselves: verses 21, 22, 23.

(3) The world. While it is true that the Lord says that He prays not for the world, there is much that indicates a real concern that the world should be convinced to the point of believing. "That the world may believe...": verses 21, 23.

The more we meditate upon these three things above mentioned, in the light of other things said by Jesus, the more convinced we shall be that they are not three things at all, but one.

The glorifying of the Father and the Son, and the effectual testimony of the Church to the world, will be by the reality of unity or oneness in that Body.

But it is imperative and essential that we understand the meaning and nature of both glory and union. These two go together and are inseparable.

Because the matter is not mentioned specifically by name in this prayer, it might be thought to be either irrelevant or importing something not inherent when we say that, both through our Lord's own words recorded in this Gospel and in much of the New Testament -

The Glorifying of the Father and the Son Is in Resurrection

If this is truly so, as we shall show it to be, then it would not be irrelevant if our Lord, with His Cross and death immediately before Him, in beginning His prayer with "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee.", had resurrection definitely in mind. This surely is borne out by such further thoughts as: "Glorify thou me... with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.", (vs. 5), and: "I am no more in the world... I come to thee.", (vs. 11), and: "Father, that which thou has given me, I will that, where I am, they also may be with me; that they may behold my glory...", (vs. 24).

If we look elsewhere in this Gospel we shall find two very explicit instances of the uniting of glory with resurrection. In chapter 11 the raising of Lazarus is definitely and positively said to be "for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified..." In chapter 12 the enquiry of certain Greeks to see Jesus draws from Him firstly the statement: "The hour is come", (note these words again in the prayer of chapter 17), "that the Son of man should be glorified"; then the simile of the grain of wheat dying and rising in much fruitfulness. All that immediately follows in the context is instructive in this relationship.

If glory is the expression of the satisfaction of Divine nature with Divine work - as it truly is - then resurrection is the Divine attestation that God's nature is wholly satisfied, and glory follows.

Then we have to take the second step.

The Ground of Resurrection Is the Ground of Oneness

If oneness is the basis of the glorifying of the Father and the Son, then this oneness is projected beyond the Cross to the ground of resurrection. Those who are to bear testimony, by their oneness, to the glory of God, are those who stand firstly on the ground of the full satisfaction of the Divine nature in what the Son did at the Cross, and then in the oneness of a new life in resurrection. There is no glory without the perfect sacrifice and work of the Cross. There is no glory until that has been attested by God's unique act of resurrection. There is no oneness, no unity (of the kind for which Christ prayed), until those concerned have entered experimentally and actually into the meaning of the Cross substitutionally and representatively and into the power and life of the Risen Lord!

How true this was in the case of the disciples themselves!

That leads to the third step.

Oneness Is Organic, as Being a Matter of Another Life

The unity envisaged in Christ's prayer can never be organized, arranged, agreed upon, or in any way brought about, by men. On the other hand, it is nonsense to talk about "that they all may be one" and be committed to any manmade association which insists that there is an essential and basic distinction between itself and all others. Vested interests in Christian activities are one of the main causes of disunity.

The unity of John 17 is the unity of one life. That life is not the life of the natural man, however religious and devout. It is the life with its nature and energy of One who, taking the place of the natural ("soulical") man, put that man away as having no acceptance with God, and, having done so, lives as another order of man in God's pleasure. Hence, oneness is only "in Christ", and by His resurrection life overcoming the rejected man that was.

The history of all divisions is the demonstration of one fact: that, somewhere, somehow, the life and power of "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" has been thwarted by the asserting of the life which was condemned and executed representatively at the Cross of Christ.

But - Jesus prayed, and a vast multitude has come into - at least the beginning of - the answer.

His new and other life has been received by that multitude all down the centuries, and when we meet on the ground of Christ alone, closing our eyes to the extras or deficiencies - the more or less than the fullness and aloneness of Christ - there is that in each which makes a spontaneous response to the other. Christ is ours and we are Christ's!

What a joy it is to meet a Christ-indwelt person in this Christless world! And what blessing flows, what glory warms the heart - until - until we bring up that which never had its origin or source in His resurrection, but came in later through man's unspirituality. Then the shadow creeps over and the glory fades.

What is the upshot of it all?

Let Christ be our only and utter interest. Be prepared to put our "Christian" things aside if they should in the slightest degree threaten the glory.

Thus, then, and only thus, will the Church register a convincing impact upon the world, and be "terrible as an army with banners."

"Father... glorify thy Son..."

"O Father, glorify thou me..."

"Holy Father, keep them...."

"I pray... that thou shouldst keep them..."

"I pray... that they may all be one that the world may believe..."

"that they may be one...; that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know..."

"that they may behold my glory..."

"O righteous Father... that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them."

We Beheld His Glory - Volume Two - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/6/27 6:10

Chapter 8

Reading: John chapters 18 and 19

These chapters, read as narrative, might be thought to be historical in the sense of giving an account of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, but there is that which is much more and much deeper than that. Indeed, the true meaning and value is not the historical but the spiritual. Jesus has, at length, come to that for which supremely He came from Heaven. This is the "My hour" of which He has so often spoken. He had said so many things as to why He came into the world. Now they are all concentrated into this "Hour."

Let us be quite clear on one thing. All that ever Jesus has proved to be, through the long period of nearly twenty centuries; over an ever-growing area of the world; to an ever-increasing multitude of people of every nation, tongue, class, and circumstance: all that, He was in that hour. He was no less then than He is now. He has not become a bigger or greater or more wonderful Christ than He was then. To realize this is to have an altogether transforming view of His so-called trial, judgment, and death. The elements of His subsequent history in the experience of peoples were all present then. The final and inclusive reality is His lordship. But nothing could ever look more unlike lordship than that which a superficial reading of these chapters conveys.

The Challenge to and Exposure of the Jewish Rulers

Let us look again, after having cleared and adjusted our minds as to the essential constituents of government and lordship. Over a very far-reaching area of the world, as it was then, the Jewish hierarchy, centered in High-Priest and a Council of Rulers, held sway. The far-flung Jewish system referred and deferred unquestioningly to their judgment and authority. To dispute that authority or to question its integrity was to bring down the very judgment of Heaven upon the offenders to their excommunication and execution.

Very well. Jesus knew all this, and then did two things. He challenged and refuted it, and then made havoc of it.

In that very hour, when, from all physical and natural standpoints, He was at a complete disadvantage and in "weakness," He utterly demoralized them right at the top level.

They had repeatedly to change their methods to make up a case. They darted from one point and argument to another when they sensed the weakness of their position. They resorted to subterfuges, half-truths, and false witness. They, who stood for ceremonial cleanness, were made by Him to show their inward corruption by stooping to moral infamy (18:28). If there was one thing which in their heart of hearts they hated, repudiated and would never have entertained, it was Caesar's authority. But here they are being utterly false to themselves and to their people, and are saying the most humiliating thing conceivable: "We have no king but Caesar", (19:15).

The case against them is much greater and stronger than this, but the point is that they - on all grounds - are in His judgment hall, and He is the Judge, not the other way round. This surely shows that Christ's kingdom and kingship is spiritual and moral, in righteousness and truth, not official, political, temporal, of this world; and it is a thing of terror, a devastating thing to all that is not of it. Even if you think - as they did - that you have done Him to death, got Him out of the way, you have - as they did - to meet Him and reckon with Him on these terms, and for them it has meant centuries of unspeakable misery!

The Judgment and Condemnation of Pilate

But that is not all. What of Pilate?

If the Jewish High Priest and the Sanhedrin were the center of religion over a wide area of the world, Pilate was the local representative of a still wider and more powerful world system. The long and indomitable arm of Rome and Caesar reached over the world and held it in an imperious sway. This, in a very real sense, was the world - the kingdom of this world. It could crush at a word and silence with a gesture.

The Jewish hierarchy, thinking to secure its ends through that austere and relentless power, blindly forced Jesus into the judgment hall of Pilate. With every kind of indignity and humiliation heaped upon Him He stands with no defense and no appeal.

But look - listen! What is happening?

He is quietly and steadily tearing down the moral structure of that whole edifice, and exposing the utter rottenness of its moral foundations. Pilate is nonplussed, disconcerted, cornered like a trapped creature. He is writhing, looking in every direction for some way out. Subterfuges, tricks, expedients, policy, pretension, playacting!

Jesus is the Judge and Pilate is in His court.

He forever and for history discredits Pilate as a rightful executor of equitable laws by proving him guilty of accepting reports without getting evidence (18:34,35); He makes him hide behind the transparent veil of cynicism (38); compels a verdict of innocence; draws out his inconsistency; drives him to subterfuge; makes him repeat his verdict twice (38,39; 19:4,6); uncovers a secret fear (8: note - "the more"): puts him in the place of a puppet (11); discloses more moral weakness (12,13); proves him to be a mere worldly time server (12,15,16); draws forth an acknowledgment even if in irony of universal sovereignty (19,20).

The Vindication of the Son of Man

So Jesus has established His claims. He came to bring the kingdom of God - but, thank God, not of the rotten kind in this World. He claimed to be the Truth, and He has torn the mask from the Devil's system of falsehood. He claimed to be the Light, and He has exposed the haunts and works of darkness. He came to die not at man's choice and will, but by laying down His life of His own accord. He came to overcome the world and its Prince and He has done it! And so we might go on.

The one inclusive and glorious issue is that, while men thought themselves to be in the saddle, driving on to their own ends, God in sovereignty was in charge fulfilling His own predeterminate and foreknown counsel. The real government was with the supposed "victim."

"We beheld his glory" - the glory of the transcendence of moral excellence - "glory as of an only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth."

The so-called "trial" of Jesus is a parable. It forever illustrates and demonstrates the judgment of this world - religious and

d secular - and postulates the ruin of all that is built upon corruption, falsehood, pretension, and mere formality.

Here is the -

"One death-grapple in the darkness,
Twixt old systems and the Word.
Truth for ever on the scaffold,
Wrong for ever on the throne.
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And amidst the dim unknown,
Standeth God, keeping watch above His own."

By His cross He conquers!

We Beheld His Glory - Volume Two - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/6/27 17:42

Chapter 9

Reading: John 20

After having read this chapter of John, we should immediately add Hebrews 13:20:

"Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ ..."

We are nearly at the end of this record, and therefore we would expect to find its message and content embodied in some kind of definite, inclusive summary. And so it is.

In accordance with prophecy, the Shepherd has been smitten and the sheep have been scattered (Zechariah 13:7). That scattering meant that they had been "offended." "All ye shall be offended in me this night", (Matthew 26:31). The offense, or stumbling, was due to a false expectation, a wrong basis of hope.

This was mainly the expectation and hope of something temporal, earthly, tangible, in which they would have personal interest and position.

That was all shattered and lay in ruins. The "sheep" presented a sorry picture while He lay in the tomb!

But the Great Shepherd has returned, and in this chapter we see Him reconstituting everything on the eternal basis. First He moves hither and thither, regathering to Himself the scattered and bewildered sheep.

Then He takes pains to reassure them that it is He Himself who is alive. But, while the same, there is a difference; a constitutional change, in which there is a combination of reality and mystery; a new kind of Man; humanity, but not as we know it.

He lingers long - forty days - to establish His identity, to leave them in no doubt as to His reality; and yet to leave the indelible impression of His otherness.

All this undoubtedly was meant to give meaning to the Church of which they were the nucleus. This chapter is a beautiful and concrete presentation of what the Church is in principle, according to God's mind.

(1) The Church - Transition from the Natural to the Spiritual

The Church is the aggregate of those:

(a) who have been completely disillusioned as to this world and as to any hope for it as it is: who have come to an end of all selfish and personal ambitions and interests in the Kingdom of God: who have known that disintegration in themselves which comes from trusting in their own sufficiency; and

(b) who have been gathered up and integrated upon a completely other basis - a spiritual and heavenly one.

(2) The Church - A Witness to the Resurrection

The Church is an exclusive witness to the Resurrection of Christ in its own experience, and in its very constitution. He confined, and always does confine, the revelation of Himself as the risen Lord to the "heirs of salvation"; it is never given to the world in general.

The Church is constituted a spiritually corporate company or "Body", a heavenly people (by His ascending to the Father as Head, verse 17) - very real but yet inscrutable. There is reality and mystery in the true Church. This mystery or inscrutability is its strength. Remove it and seek to be popular, and you destroy its authority. This is not mystery in the sense of being "mysterious", abstruse, occult, and so on, but possessing a power, a vitality, an endurance, a wisdom, a life, which is not of this creation but of another.

(3) The Church - Peace Through His Blood

The Church is constituted upon the basis of the peace which was made by the blood of His Cross (verses 19,21,26; Col. 1:20). "The God of peace... brought... from the dead the great shepherd... by the blood of the eternal covenant."

That title "the God of peace" is used by Paul in relation to the whole matter of righteousness upon which justification rests (Rom. 15:33, 16:20). In the same great argument he speaks of the Church in its corporate oneness (12:4,5). The very existence of the Church demands this great value and effect of the blood. It rests upon an eternal covenant, made and sealed thereby. There is no Church of God apart from that which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). His Church rests upon His peace - the peace of reconciliation. There should be no conflict or controversy between the Church and God, or God and the Church. The Church should always mean the place of peace for all its members. So the repeated announcement of peace by our Lord in this chapter carries with it the great and fundamental work of His Cross, and is not just a nice word to allay fears and agitation at His appearances. It links back with chapter 14.

(4) The Church and the Government of the Holy Spirit

Then the risen Lord establishes the fact that the Holy Spirit will be the governing reality in the Church for this age (verse 22).

This "breathing" on them was a symbolic act.

Firstly it symbolized a new creation, the "one new man" indwelt and energized by a new life, the life peculiar to this resurrection body - "raised together with Him." Then it was a prospective securing unto the great receiving. If the real "receiving" of the Holy Spirit took place on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 1:8, then this of which we read here was not an actual receiving, but rather a potential or prospective appointment which in due course would carry with it the authority of verse 23.

The main point is that the Church, the New Creation, the Body of Christ, is indwelt, energized, actuated and endowed by the Holy Spirit. This is not an official, but a spiritual thing. It is not ecclesiastical, political, or traditional, but vital, dynamic, and of a nature, not a system.

(5) The Church - Fellowship Through Faith

The section which brings Thomas so much into view sets forth the fact that the fullness of blessing by fellowship with the risen Lord is only, but surely, on the basis of faith. It is possible to be in and of the Church, where the fullness of Christ is to be found, and yet to be almost like an outsider. It is possible to be doctrinally or positionally of the Body corporate, and yet for all practical purposes, enjoyment and blessedness to be like an isolated and unrelated unit going a lonely way.

This is the lot of all doubters who have a question.

Faith brings into fellowship, life, experience, and worship!

(6) The Church - A Family

Finally. The most beautiful character of the Church, which lifts it out of all cold formalism, legalistic death and stiffness, and mere ecclesiasticism, is indicated by the family terms here used - "Father," "brethren" (verse 17). Here again we are taken to the letter to the Hebrews, 2:11-13,17; 3:1.

The Church is a family. "The last Adam" is "a life-giving Spirit", (1 Cor. 15:45). He begets sons and daughters through the travail of his soul, (Isaiah 53:11).

He makes His "brethren" the "congregation" in the midst of which He "sings" (Heb. 2:12).

All this leads to the testimony to His Divine Person. The main evidence of His being "the Christ, the Son of God", (verses 30,31) is found in His significant (or "sign") acts in the Church, i.e. the mighty effects of His death and resurrection.

We Beheld His Glory - Volume Two - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/6/28 17:11

Chapter 10

Reading: John 21

It is fairly generally agreed that this part of John's record is a kind of after-inspiration. The main narrative closed with the comprehensive statement of 20:30,31.

We have to try to see why John should have had this reaction from his closure and should have felt constrained to append this further episode with its several aspects. He evidently felt it important and necessary to do so. Hence it must not fail to register with us as being something more than an afterthought or a sudden recollection of an omission.

Firstly, we must realize that what is here is a part of Luke's emphatic statement: "To whom he also shewed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God.", (Acts 1:3).

This, then, is an integral part of the purpose of the forty days. The Lord's definite purpose in that period (which was probationary and testing: the number forty always indicates that in the Bible) was - on the one side to detach His Church (here represented in another symbolic number - seven) from an old, purely earthly, sentient and natural relationship with Himself, and on the other side to establish a new basis of that relationship and service, that is, a heavenly, spiritual, and universal.

John had just written concerning Mary's sudden recognition of her Lord, probably by the way in which He spoke her name (20:16). He said to her: "Take not hold on me." This would at least imply that the old relationship and its physical form (her Mary had anointed His feet and head) no longer obtained, but had changed. It was now a spiritual one entirely. John's Gospel is the one of spirituality; he called the miracles of Jesus "signs", meaning that they were intended to signify spiritual truths and principles and not to be just mighty acts. So this last part of the record is full of spiritual principles. These we must grasp.

Having seen, then, that the first principle is the new kind of relationship, let us take that a step further. This new basis requires that the men of the new dispensation be spiritual men, and their work is to be spiritual work. This is exceedingly testing to the natural man. Indeed, he cannot stand up to it. Until he receives the Holy Spirit as an indwelling reality, and so becomes a spiritual person basically, all attempts to cope with spiritual things will be defeated. "The natural man cannot know the things which are spiritual", said Paul (1 Cor. 2:14). Now this is borne out in the case of the central figure in the circle of disciples in our chapter.

Peter's Defection

It would seem evident that the new phase or form of things, which had come in with the Lord's resurrection - appearances and disappearances, was too much for Peter. He was no mystic. There was nothing of that in his makeup. He was just one of the very practical type, with whom policy is often more than principle. Things must just "come down to earth," and be "black and white"; one must "call a spade a spade." "Let's see exactly where we are," they say. "It ends that matter, not so much how you reach them." To such, anything that cannot be defined in obvious explanation is not real; indeed it is most unsatisfactory.

So Peter, not made for this "uncertain" and "illusive" kind of life, cannot bear it longer, and he says: "I go a fishing ." "That is practical and tangible, anyway, and we do have some qualification in that realm - we are at home there." Sensitiveness and imagination are not the strong points of this temperament. It rides roughly over delicate ground. Rough seas, and the practical features of a fisherman's life, are more in keeping with this disposition than tender lambs and foolish sheep. Indeed, it would sooner beard lions than feed lambs!

So "I go a fishing" is the reaction from the seeming uncertainties of the spiritual life. Peter was going to learn differently before long. Peter seems to have had a magnetic influence over others. Even the more spiritual John seems to have been affected by him. Although John had just recently outrun Peter to the tomb, his sensitiveness kept him from doing more than look in. But following up, puffing and blowing, came Peter, and he, without any such delicate restraint, "entered in." "Then entered in therefore the other disciple also." Unconscious influence! And so on this other occasion the rest said: "We also come with thee."

There is a strange and notable anomaly about this particular type of person. With all the physical venturesomeness, initiative, aggressiveness, and even self-confidence, there is the contrast between physical and moral courage, to say nothing of spiritual courage. Peter is a well-known example, and the particular instances need not be pointed out. This representative seven will learn the fundamental lesson of the new age which had dawned.

So "they went forth, and entered into the boat; and that night they took nothing ." "That night"!

We now have the background set for the message of the important "afterthought" or new urge of John in this "appendix" (?). But let us note at this point that a very great deal of spiritual value, enlargement, adjustment, and eternal significance may be bound up with frustration and disappointment. "That night" was a turning point. There is often Providence in reverses. Success along natural lines might seriously jeopardize or sabotage the whole spiritual intention of God! So, whether it be in a swift and almost immediate setback, or in a long-drawn-out sapping of gratification, a slow realization forced upon us that we are getting nowhere in the things that really matter, the faithfulness of God makes reverses and abortive labor one of His ways of deep education.

So, then, the inclusive lesson of this chapter is that of -

The Difference Between the Natural and the Spiritual

Natural capacity. Natural disposition. Natural ability. Natural direction. Natural energy. Natural courage. It is so evident that at the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost meant a change in this whole realm. Note that this was just the point at which things went astray. The Lord had "charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father", (Acts 1:4). Peter said: "I go a fishing." Jesus had said much about the coming Holy Spirit. Peter said "I" and they said "We." Very well, then, there can only be "nothing" along that line! This is the age of the Holy Spirit, and apart from His absolute government the story must be one of toil for nothing where the Church is concerned.

Peter seems to have had little capacity for the spiritual he seems to have broken down at that point all along. See such instances as: "Lord, thou shalt never wash my feet"; "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee "; etc. But this capacity came in a new and wonderful way with the Holy Spirit. The same was true on all the other points mentioned above.

The Lord turned this many-sided difference upon one point, both in the symbolic act and in a final word. The point was -

Absolute Subjection to the Lordship of Christ

All the natural grounds of assurance being exhausted - training, experience, facility, ability, the suitable season, etc. - the Lord issued a challenge. It was a critical moment. All natural arguments would have been naturally justified in flouting the suggestion.

But it may have been the last resort of a forlorn hope, or something in the tone and manner of the command they obeyed.

Peter ever stands out afterward as the man who, when Christ prevailed, moved into a new fullness in a new realm - I leave you to follow that out. He is the great example of the principle that subjection to Christ is the way of spiritual fullness.

This was the lesson of the early morning - the new day. This was the Lord's meaning when He said: "Truly, truly, I say unto thee, When thou was young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not."

The Lord knew Peter - that there was, and always would be, that element in him of "thou wouldst" or "wouldst not", but that in progressive and final submission he should "glorify God."

In this Lordship of Christ two further factors existed.

One, the whole question of the nature and quality of his love for Christ. It is so well known that in His threefold challenge to Peter (verses 15-17) the Lord used one word for love, while Peter used another and a lesser. We do not enlarge upon this, beyond pointing out that the quality of love is tested by our ability to let go to the Lord and empty ourselves of ourselves before Him.

The other thing is that -

Service Flows from Subjection and Love

The Lord had more than once sought to inculcate this principle with His disciples - notably in the feet-washing incident (chap. 12). It was the principle of His own coming and service. Through Paul it came out in its fullness (Phil. 2:5-8). He, our Master, emptied and humbled Himself, and became the Good Shepherd, laying down His life for the sheep. It was acted, not by "fondness" but by "love." Not by protestations of love (as with Peter), but by proved and faithful - undeny- ing - love.

This is the heart of this dialogue between the Master and the servant; the Chief Shepherd and the under-shepherd, in our chapter.

As we have said, it represents a change of disposition in Peter. Some thoughtful, patient and humble care is required to "feed my sheep", "Feed my lambs", and impulsive, erratic, blustering hotheadedness will not do; neither will self-will and self-confidence.

So the "third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after that he was risen..." (vs. 14) taught them the great principles of the new age of the Spirit into which they were entering:

1. Christ can, and must, be known only after the Spirit now, not after the flesh.
2. When we have become spiritual men and women by having received the Spirit, this is actually a more real way of knowing Him.
3. Working in the flesh from our own impulses; reactions or lapses from this heavenly resurrection position into natural efforts and energies, will result in "nothing."
4. The Lord, in mercy and grace, does not leave us finally in the despair of such failure, but even allows or orders the failure, to teach us the lesson that the way of abundant fullness is that of resurrection life and power.
5. The absolute Lordship of Christ is the supreme and inclusive law of life and service in this age, involving our utter submission.
6. That law may mean work for which we are not naturally qualified, or to which we are not temperamentally disposed, but for which ability comes by the fullness of the Spirit.
7. Although the situation is so strange and mysterious to all our natural make-up, and we need new and other capacities, yet it is more potent, fruitful and permanent than all that we could do on the level of human natural abilities.

We Beheld His Glory - Volume Two - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/6/28 17:39

A Retrospect

We have come now to the end of these brief meditations in the Gospel by John. Nothing academic has been attempted. All technical questions have been avoided. The spiritual message and value has been the sole object.

Throwing a look back over this record, one thing may be taken up profitably for notice and re-emphasis. With all the beauty and wonder of what is gathered into this account, it is not possible to avoid the realization that from beginning to end the writer was up against something. Both in what he himself said about Jesus, and in all the scenes, incidents, and utterances recorded of Jesus, there is a strenuous element, which varies from controversy, reserve, antagonism, and question, to lack of capacity to appreciate, understand, or believe.

This (either positive or negative) difficulty covers the religious leaders, the people in view generally, and particularly disciples and friends. There is something to be overcome, to be broken down, or to be changed. Jesus is a mystery; that is what it amounts to. He is other, different - an enigma. He cannot be interpreted in any of the standard terms of either human nature or religion, as generally known and accepted. He is a stranger, an outsider, and the easiest thing is to be against and not with Him. Indeed, it is difficult not to be offended with Him, even in the case of the closest friends. All this in spite of the great amount said as to His love.

What, then, does it all amount to? Is there something in this which is as much the message of the book as anything particularly recorded in it? I think there is, and it is this. There are two realms which, while at times and in certain cases seem to be nearer than at others, never do actually meet or overlap. They are two separate realms, and not two shades or degrees of one. The one never does or can fully understand, appreciate, or comprehend the other, and religion - traditional religion - gives no great advantage, if any, in this matter.

It is just the wide and unbridgeable difference between the spiritual on the one hand, and the natural - even though devoutly religious - on the other. The gap remains and that is the reason for so much of the difficulty, the trouble, the perplexity! It explains the aloneness and loneliness of Jesus. Paul drank deeply of this cup. The way of the Spirit and spirituality is a lonely way, a misunderstood way, and often an antagonized way. Adjust everything to the reason of man and the traditions of men, and this element of hard going will be eliminated. Walk by the Spirit, and you are with a minority.