

John - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Turpin

Some Turpin Pamphlets, Attractive Power of Christ Crucified: the Separating Power of Christ at His Coming, The (12:20-33)

(John 3:11-17; 12:20-38; 1 Thess. 4:13-18)

The history of man has been failure and ruin throughout, and Scripture is not silent in its testimony as to this, either in the Old or New Testament. The second chapter of John furnishes a striking proof of this statement; whether that scripture be regarded from a moral or a dispensational point of view, the same solemn reality is inscribed upon it. Let us examine for a little the concluding verses of that chapter.

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man.

Here, then, is a fact of the deepest moment, and one specially necessary to remember in these days, when human ingenuity is taxed to its utmost, to produce an effect on man as he is; if his feelings can be wrought upon in any way, then it is expected a lever power has been placed underneath him, whereby mighty results may show forth themselves in him. This being the case pre-eminently just now, it is well to have God's estimate of the value of all such efforts. It is said that in the feast day at Jerusalem many believed in His name, seeing the miracles Jesus did; yet that unto such Jesus did not commit Himself, knowing man, and what was in man. Does any one enquire what point or force has such an utterance with respect to the subject in hand? Much every way, but specially that in the next chapter, Jesus declares to the master in Israel, the positive necessity for a new man; the fact is, there must be a new nature, a creature of God, born of water and the Spirit—the old can neither be trusted nor improved; no power in heaven or on earth can ameliorate man; he may be convinced as to mind, he may be reformed as to outward habits, as we may have seen the once cold and negative sceptic, changed into the respectable citizen who gives an outward credence to all the great facts of Christianity; or as we may see the drunkard and profligate man, outwardly turned into the sober and steady man; but all this touches not the springs within, these are left in their nature and sources corrupt and irreparably bad.

Now herein lies the moral beauty and magnificence of the cross of Christ, that no one in heaven or earth could conceive as the blessed God did, or accomplish as the eternal Son did, that and that alone which could meet the desperate nature of the case. So perfectly has God been glorified about sin, that not only are the saved constituted the righteousness of God in Christ, but believers in Him are blessed up to the very heights of that glory where God's right hand has exalted our Savior and our Lord. There are two sides in this wonderful economy of grace, God's side and man's side; as to the latter, the word is unmistakable, "ye must be born again." "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." As to the former, the word is equally significant, "the Son of man must be lifted up." How completely these two sides of truth, with their respective aspects, combine in winding up man's history as such; without a spark of goodness in himself he had not even the appreciation of it in another; if it had been there the blessed Son of God would have drawn it forth; but, alas! we know too well that it was in the presence of manifested goodness as seen in Jesus, that the badness and hatred of man toward all that was lovely and divine were most witnessed. The historical fact recorded in the Old Testament, with which John 3 is associated, is very instructive. We are carried back to Num. 21, which describes a scene in the thirty-ninth year of Israel's wilderness pilgrimage. Rebellion of such a character sprang up in the camp, as to bring down upon the people the punishment of death, and death too of such a nature, even the poisonous venom of fiery serpents! This marked change in the ways of God with Israel calls for notice on our part. Let it be observed how up to this point every curative process had been resorted unto and tried; but now as it were in the very close, the last year of wilderness wandering, the blessed God exposes man in his true light, as one whom no curative process could reach, and introduces that which pointed on to other days, which pre-figured that redemption which was no after-thought with God—that which was nothing less than the introduction of life into the midst of death. If in the midst of life we are in death, how very blessed to know that in the midst of death there is life; and oh, what life! No less a life than that which has gained the victory over death, and him who had the power of death.

Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

Observe, there is no thought whatever of setting aside the judgment of God. Where would be righteousness in that? And if, on the other hand, it were all righteousness, in peremptory destruction, where were the love?

Herein then shines out God's wisdom, in that He provides an answer commensurate with His own nature to His moral claims. God ever sustains His relations with us, not only according to His own nature, but also after a manner which carries security and confidence to us. This, the serpent of brass put upon a pole, was to Israel, and this the Son of man lifted up upon the cross is to poor sinners to-day. The death of Christ was, historically, "in the end of the age." Every trial had only brought out the solemn fact that hope alone was in God; and then it was that He, in whose nature all the springs of love and mercy were, came forth to show Himself able not only to vindicate His righteous attributes in the face of rebellion and revolt, but able at the same time, and as well, to save the guilty rebel, and to give him the place of a son and heir—an heir of God and joint heir with Christ. Marvelous grace of our God, who is "wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."

Now, observe how the Son of Man lifted up on the cross is set forth as the resource and attractive object of poor hearts, all whose hopes and joys had departed and fled; just as the serpent of brass lifted up on the pole, in the midst of Israel's misery and distress, was the one point whither dying ones were attracted and blessed. In the eyes of man, what could be more futile or contemptible? So Christ crucified, the Son of man lifted up, writes scorn on all the wisdom of man, and is scorned thereby; that which was a stumbling-block to the Jew, and foolishness to the Greek, is God's wisdom and God's power, and is, as well, the one spot where weary hearts overburdened with sin find shelter and rest. We shall find the same blessed facts brought out in John 12. Let us turn to the scripture for a little. It was a wonderful moment for Jesus; Mary with affection and sympathy entering into its peculiarity, anoints His body for the burying; the kingdom is present before His eyes and

thoughts; for Israel welcomed Him, at least for the moment, and the Greeks want to “see Jesus.” Is there any reason why He should die in order to take it? Does not every affection of your heart resent the impious thought? But does not your soul bow down and worship in His presence who could have claimed the kingdom as His own, but would not without dying, in order that God might be glorified, and that He Himself in His love might associate with Himself in the glory of God poor things like us?

“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” {John 12:24}; and then there opens out before the Savior’s eyes the value, import, and glory of His work.

Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This He said, signifying what death He should die.

Being thus lifted up from the earth, He became the attractive object for weary souls in a world that had departed from God; as another has blessedly expressed it, “By death, He morally and judicially destroyed him who had the power of death. It was the total and entire annihilation of all the rights of the enemy, over whomsoever and whatsoever it might be, when the Son of God and Son of man bore the judgment of God, as man, in obedience unto death. All the rights that Satan possessed through man’s disobedience, and the judgment of God upon it, were only rights in virtue of the claims of God upon man, and come back to Christ alone. And being lifted up between God and the world in obedience on the cross, bearing that which was due to sin, Christ became the point of attraction for all men living, that through Him they might draw nigh to God. While living, Christ ought to have been owned as the Messiah; lifted up from the earth as a victim before God, being no longer of the earth as living upon it, He was the point of attraction towards God for all those who, living on earth, were alienated from God, as we have seen, that they might come to Him there (by grace), and have life through the Savior’s death.” Wondrous spot this, which thus forms a meeting-place between God and ruined sinners! And how must it not have stood out before His soul at this moment, when the great constituent parts of the kingdom, in which He is to be glorified, had passed before the Lord? And is it too much to say that the “much fruit” which His precious death was to bring forth, both as regards His Father’s counsels and glory, and us, the children of His love, was beyond everything to His heart?

There is another point of peculiar beauty here. Let us observe it well. It is a festive scene; all are, as it were, in the joy of the Feast of Tabernacles; but Jesus is solitary and alone—death is before His Spirit, and not the kingdom with its honors and joys. But this solitariness of Jesus here is only in keeping with all His blessed path on earth; He was ever in life the solitary man, His heart looking on to the time when He should enter into the deepest and most profound loneliness, to leave it behind Him for ever. Do our hearts, beloved, grasp the moral magnificence of these words—“much fruit”? Have we the divine appreciation of such result of the Savior’s death? Do we carry in our bosoms the overpowering fact that we are part of that much fruit? Is it a small thing to know that a Christian is a man of a different generation from the first Adam? Blessed it is surely to receive through His name present pardon and peace, a full and final discharge from all our sins on the merits of His death; but to think that I am part of the fruit of the Savior’s death, part of that company whom He has brought through His death to stand in His own place before His Father and God, of that assembly in the midst of which He praises, part of that family that He confesses as His brethren—not ashamed to do so—“Behold, I and the children which God hath given me.” All this, and much more, is past all human thought, and silent adoration is the only proper attitude of the soul introduced into the presence of such grace and glory.

I turn now to the other branch of our subject; viz., “The separating power of Christ at His coming.” The scripture which unfolds this in detail is 1 Thess. 4. It is important to remark one or two points of great interest in connection with the taking up of the saints ere we examine the subject in detail. First of all, it was to the apostle of the Church that a special revelation in connection with this, its hope, was vouchsafed. “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord,” signalizes what comes after as something special; it was suitable every way, that what related to its finish, at least as regards the earth, should be communicated after the same manner, as well as through the same channel, as that which marks “the revelation of the mystery,” and also the symbol of its unity here below. (See Eph. 3:1-3; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 10:16, 17.) The Lord’s Supper and the rapture of the saints raised or changed were subjects then concerning which Paul the apostle of the Church received those special communications and revelations already alluded to. It is evident that this special revelation touching the coming of the Lord to the air had both a general and a special aspect. With regard to the first, it is made known as the true and proper hope of the Church; it is not death, but the coming of the Lord. With respect to the latter, it is plain that the uneasiness regarding the position of those who had fallen asleep in Christ at Thessalonica was met by the apostle through this special revelation of God. The Thessalonian saints did not sorrow for their dead as if any uncertainty rested on their minds with regard to them, but they were perplexed as to the part or position of these sleeping ones in view of the coming of the Lord. Hence we say this revelation to Paul has a particular as well as a universal bearing. This “gathering together unto Him” is the great crisis for which we wait; and it is as well, blessed for ever be His name and grace, the one thing for which He the Lord Jesus Christ waits. “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive” (take) “you unto myself; that where I am, ye may be also.” What wonderful grace! He reckons that nothing could be so comforting to us as that He should come and receive us to Himself, not merely to heaven, but to Himself. What a moment that will be for Jesus when He comes to the air and welcomes to Himself those whom He has loved, and whose affections He died to win! How shall not our hearts overflow with joy when we throng around Him, the true center of His own.

Let us meditate a little on the order of the rapture as it is unfolded in this scripture. The first fact communicated was intended to tell upon the sorrow of the saints at Thessalonica. Those who are alive at the moment of the rapture shall not take precedence of those who have fallen asleep. This was designed by the Lord to meet the perplexity of their hearts, as to the supposed place of inferiority which sleeping in Christ assigned to any who had passed away. They suffer in nowise in this respect—they slept in Christ; they were waiting there, as we who are alive are waiting here; but more than that, they first are the subjects of His quickening power, who is the resurrection and the life. Is it not like Himself the Lord, to put forth His power on the weakest first? In them is displayed the glory of Him who said to the sorrowing sister, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Thus would Jesus wipe the tears of the sorrowful and bereaved. “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” His glory as “the life” is displayed in these, as that of “the resurrection” is displayed in those. A virtue will go forth from Him which will entirely obliterate all trace of mortality; then shall what is mortal be swallowed up by life; then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory.” It is very blessed to notice how it is said, we “shall be caught up together.” Time and years, circumstances, death and sin, may have severed us from each other until then; but now there shall be no more mention made of divided or severed interests. We shall be caught up together—attracted, drawn by a common object, abundantly able now to win and claim and satisfy these worthless hearts of ours, even as He

Himself is the perfect delight of His Father's heart.

There are two things in connection with being caught up—we shall see Him, and we shall be like Him. Wonderful realities! What a consideration for us all; and yet how few of us that have our hearts thus under the power of these divine realities—"We shall see Him as He is"! We are predestinated to this. (See Rom. 8:29.) Blessed invigorating hope to cheer the heart amid the trials and sorrows that intervene. Oh, when we look into that blessed face, how will not the heart find its abundant compensation for all its waiting and watching for Him!

"For ever to behold Him shine, For evermore to call Him mine, And see Him still before me; For ever on His face to gaze, And meet the full assembled rays, While all His beauty He displays To all the saints in glory."

But it is also said "we shall be like Him." This, too, is wonderful; we, so little like Him now, then to be perfectly like Him, and as we have borne the image of the earthy, to bear the image of the heavenly. How blessed to think that God has before Himself, in the One who adorns His throne in the heavens, the type, the pattern, the sample of what the fruit of the death of Jesus is to be. When Israel entered the land of promise, and reaped the harvest of Canaan, they were directed by Jehovah to bring a sheaf of the first-fruits of their harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath" (i.e., on the first day of the week) "the priest shall wave it. And ye shall offer that day, when ye wave the sheaf, an he lamb without blemish of the first year, for a burnt-offering unto the Lord. And the meat-offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the Lord for a sweet savor: and the drink-offering thereof shall be of wine, fourth part of an hin. And, ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the self-same day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, in all your dwellings. And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat-offering unto the Lord. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves, of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the first-fruits unto the Lord. And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish, the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt-offering unto the Lord, with their meat-offering, and their drink-offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savor unto the Lord. Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin-offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace-offerings. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the first-fruits, for a wave-offering before the Lord, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the Lord for the priest" (Lev. 23:11-20).

Now Christ risen from the dead on the morrow after the Sabbath, that is, on the first day of the week, is the great antitype of the sheaf of first-fruits; and the same relation which existed between that sheaf and the harvest of Canaan, exists likewise through grace between Christ and His own. Is it not blessed to think of this? His saints, His own, are the antitype of the new meat-offering. Observe how leaven was allowed in this. Because it was intended to represent the saints of God, they are the fruit of His death; as He said Himself, "If it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24).

When the blessed Lord walked as a man on earth, wonderful and beautiful as was His path, He walked therein absolutely alone. He was solitary in life, solitary in death. Truly we may say, "Of the people there were none with Him." His life of perfect obedience, precious as it was under the eye of God, never brought one soul to stand with Him where He Himself stood; but His death produced fruit. "If it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." And in that bright day which is approaching, His saints, the fruit of His death, shall be perfectly like Himself. The attractive power of Christ at His coming is what we look for; we expect to be caught away, snatched away, as it were. How little, alas! are our souls under the formative power of such a hope.

It is interesting to observe the different ways in which the coming of the Lord is treated in Philippians and Thessalonians. In the former it is brought in at chapter 3, and is to the soul what home, suddenly breaking on the vision, is to the jaded, foot-sore traveler. He had pressed on amid heat, and dust, and fog, and suddenly, as it were, home greets him, and the satisfaction of the heart is expressed at meeting Christ Himself. But in Thessalonians there is energy and power of the Lord, suited to the weakness of His own, well as the finishing touch, so to speak, put upon the revelation of the truth through Paul. If this be reality, as assuredly it is, what kind of people ought we to be who profess to hold it as the hope of our hearts? The Lord grant, in His rich mercy that our conversation may be in heaven, from whence we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christian Truth: Volume 1, My Sheep Hear My Voice and Follow Me (10:27)

If there be one lack in souls at the present time more marked than another, it is feebleness of apprehension as to these two great points—hearing and following.

The quietness of communion is but little known, not to say enjoyed, in this busy active day. How truly the moment speaks loudly of unrest and unreality; and how little is known, even among the saints, of that deep, personal, unexpressed joy in Christ.

The satisfaction of the heart in the personal nearness to Christ, the being in His company for the simple joy of it, is true communion; thus it is we have common mind with Him, which is the meaning of communion. When this is the case, we know the mind of our Lord and Master, and this it is which qualifies us for every service as Christ's confidential servants; it is well to bear in mind that the amount of our service or the laboriousness of our work do not of themselves constitute us confidential servants.

There is a very close alliance, a very intimate connection, between the two attitudes of soul we are considering; in fact they wait the one on the other. It is very blessed to see the producing and maintaining power of hearing and following Christ. In a word, it is Christ. He and He alone is the blessed source and spring of all that has its rise and satisfaction in Himself. To be a good listener, one must be both free and at rest.

Following seems to come in as a consequence of what we have had before us: "My sheep hear My voice... and they follow Me." As it is the Shepherd's voice that is heard and known by the sheep, so it is the Shepherd Himself they follow; He it is who has gone before. In the passage quoted from John 10 we find the blessed Lord, scorned and reproached, leaving the ancient fold of Judaism, and thus going before His sheep, the security to all His own that it was the true way, as well as the authority for the sheep following Him—come what may—their hiding place from danger, and their safe conduct for the way.

It is very blessed to see how it is the knowing His voice here (vss. 4-5), not that they know all the false voices of strangers, but their security is in knowing His voice, and they likewise follow as they know it. My reader, has your heart found One whom you are now following? Is this your one object day by day? It is very blessed to be allowed to serve, but many a one serves in this day who is not following. O for more distinct going forth from all around to follow a rejected Lord and Master, and to esteem it our holiest joy to tread the path He has walked in, rough it may be, but trodden by Himself, who has left His own mark upon every rose and every thorn.

"A little while, He'll come again!

Let us the precious hours redeem;

Our only grief to give Him pain,

Our joy to serve and follow Him."

W. T. T.

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