

John - Commentaries by William John Hocking

The Sustenance of Life, Sustenance of Life, The: Part 2 (6:52-62)

(Concluded from page 266)

CHRIST IN DEATH

Without food we lose strength. Our food is Christ Himself. But we go on to observe that spiritual nutrition is obtained in more than one manner. We read of feeding upon Christ as the manna, that is, upon Christ as the Incarnate Son of God. But we are also called to partake of His flesh and His blood: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (ver. 53). This to the natural mind is a mysterious statement, as some said upon hearing it, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" And to drink His blood was even more startling; for they knew this was an express prohibition under the law of Moses. Yet the Lord spoke definitely of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and moreover, was emphatic in stating its necessity. Apart from it, He said, "Ye have no life in you."

Now it is evident that while manna, the bread from heaven, has special reference to the life of Christ, the flesh and the blood must refer to His death. Blood circulating in the body is essential to life, while apart from the body it offers evidence of death. Hence when the soldier pierced the side of the crucified Lord, the issuing blood and water proved that death was there. Upon this witness Roman justice concluded that the legal sentence had been satisfactorily executed, and the same evidence appealed, but differently, to the sorrowing apostles and those with them.

Sacrificially, it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul. The sin of man constituted an impassable barrier between the perfect life of Jesus and the life of the best of men. But the sacrifice of Christ was the judicial end of the natural man, and therefore forms the means whereby the believer can enter into and appropriate the life of Christ which He displayed here below.

As a matter of history we find that not until the death of Christ was the characteristic life of Jesus in any sense reproduced in His followers. The incompatibility of the life of the disciples in its springs of action with that of their Master is frequently to be observed in the Gospels. In this chapter, for instance, we find that many were unable to walk with Him any longer. They were those who accompanied the Lord, heard His words, and witnessed His marvelous deeds, yet there was a strange lack of imbibing the Spirit of Christ. See, again, the case of James and John when the Lord sent messengers to a Samaritan village that the inhabitants might receive Him. Upon their refusal these two foremost apostles said, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?" (Luke 9:54). The Lord rebuked them, saying, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." But their speech revealed the disparity between their thoughts and motives and those of the Master.

Even at the close of the Lord's ministry this partition wall between their souls and Him had not disappeared. At the last Supper, with all its solemn associations and intimations, it was made clear that the apostles had not taken their Master's yoke upon them. They were not, like Him, meek and lowly in heart; for they quarreled there among themselves who should be the greatest in the coming kingdom. They were seeking for the pre-eminence, and thus showed that they had not fed upon Him who "emptied himself and became a bond-servant." They had not made His life their own.

The truth is that only through the death of Christ could His life be manifested in His disciples. He came to give His flesh for the life of the world. When His blood was shed, the way was thereby opened for their union and communion with Him. After His resurrection, He breathed upon them that they might receive the Holy Ghost, and be endued, in power, with that new life in the character peculiar to Himself.

It is thus taught that something more than mere acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ was necessary to become a faithful witness of Him. There was no union with Him in incarnation, but the link was in His death, and in the life which was beyond death,

THE DISPLAY OF LIFE

This important principle of conduct is not generally recognized. Perhaps the most common form of teaching is that Christian life consists in the study of the glorious example revealed in the Gospels and in meditation upon His words and deeds. But while this is true it is not the whole of the truth, and it is not the truth before us here. For we learn that it is by way of His death that we become associated with His life. And the display of that life is inseparable from eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

The contemplation of the perfections of Christ coupled with the knowledge that they were utterly beyond our attainment in any degree would but plunge us into the mire of dark despair. His perfect example would be but a mockery to us. And apart from His death we could but miserably fail to walk as He walked. But in the knowledge of His death for us and of our death with Him there follows in measure the practical incorporation of His life in ours, Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith.

In the Epistle to the Philippians there is a practical exposition of this manner of life. Paul, the "prisoner of Jesus Christ," pours forth the Christian experience of his heart. He sets before himself and others the embodiment of the mind of Christ as it was exhibited in this world (chap. 2). This is genuine Christian experience—not as some would have it, the realization of one's inward depravity, and of an ineradicable susceptibility to evil. The latter is the gloomy experience of self, true but not inspiring; it is in no sense the experience of Christ.

This life shining through the apostle's communications to the saints at Philippi takes the character of joy and peace and liberty and delight. This character is the more striking when we remember how all the energy of the writer in self-denying gospel service was frustrated by his protracted imprisonment, while his very chains alienated his fellow-believers from him. But in spite of this suffering and this spiritual privation his personal Christian joy beams forth with exceptional brilliance.

Why was this? It is evidently the result of his own communion with Christ at that time. He was then treading a pathway of suffering in close imitation of his Master who loved and served, and was hated for it.

During the ministry of Christ there was a heart here and there which recognized Him, but this was exceptional. The majority came to hear Him because there was something new, or they came to Him for healing, but there was no heart-exercise, no conscience-work. How did this astonishing apathy appear to the Lord Jesus Christ in whose heart there were supernatural energies of love and life? In His unparalleled service He was cramped and straitened by the obduracy of man, but there was no murmuring, no diminution in the intensity of His love and service for man. He was unchangeably the same. His was a voice, one would think, that would have commanded the fealty of all mankind; but this was not the result of His service. However, in spite of the repulse of His love, He went forward and administered the water of life to a single poor woman at the well. For the Son of God learned obedience in this way, "by the things which he suffered." But the light of this divine testimony, so perfect in Him, was not extinguished at Calvary: after His resurrection, it shone afresh in the lives of His believing followers, as we may see from the Acts and the Epistles.

THE HABIT OF COMMUNION

But while the Christian pathway commences with the appropriation of Christ in His death, it is necessary for this appropriation to be continued to the end: "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (ver. 54). This statement looks on to the end of the journey when the ideals of the believer's new life will be realized fully. But this involves the formation of the habit of eating and drinking continuously. There must be the bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal bodies (2 Cor. 4:10). So the Lord said here, "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me, and I in him" (ver. 56). This implies the practice of this habit.

Here we have two things: (1) our dwelling in Christ, and (2) Christ in us. First, there is dwelling in Christ, which involves unbroken communion with Him, and this it is the privilege of every believer to enjoy. The habit of it is implied by the phraseology—dwelling, abiding; it is not to be intermittent and spasmodic.

Christ Himself walked thus in connection with the Father who sent Him. All circumstances found Him in the fullest heavenly intercourse. It was His meat to do the will of Him who sent Him.

In a similar manner we are called to abide in Christ. Eating in scripture is a figure frequently employed for communion. The peace offering was the particular sacrifice which set forth the communion of Jehovah and of the priestly family and of the people of Israel. The sacrifice itself was dedicated to God, and the fat and the blood were Jehovah's exclusively, while the character of what constituted the portion of the priests and the people was based upon its being a sacrifice, agreeing thus in type with what we have here, viz., that Christian communion is founded upon the death of Christ.

In the New Testament, fellowship is enjoined as an essential feature of Christianity. And there exists a formal expression of this fellowship as well as the inner personal side, the latter being the subject of this chapter. The outward sign is the communion table which the Lord established as the central institution for His own. In meeting together for the purpose of eating bread and drinking wine in commemoration of His death, a visible expression of this fellowship is made by the church.

Again, in Luke 15, the father and the restored son are depicted at the same table, feasting together upon the fatted calf. They have found a common interest, a common joy, and the central feature of this communion is the slain calf, representing, of course, the Lord Jesus in His death, which is the meeting-place of God and the rescued sinner for the holy joy and rest of communion. "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Rom. 5:11). Through Him we have constant access into the Father's presence, and have, therefore, fellowship with the Father and the Son.

CHRIST IN US

The necessary corollary to our dwelling in Christ is His abiding in us. If we are in Him for personal peace and joy, He is in us for testimony in the world. Here also we must look to Christ Himself to learn the meaning of the phrase. Let us refer to that occasion when the Lord told His disciples that they knew the Father and had seen Him. Philip expressed incredulous surprise at such a statement, saying, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." The Lord explained to the apostle His meaning: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.... The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me" (John 14:8-11).

In the life of Jesus Christ therefore the Father in His love was communicated to men. Looking at and through Him, so to speak, the realities of heaven were seen. This then was the wonder of that life, though but feebly recognized even by men of faith. For it was the glory of God that the Father should be thus amply displayed. In like manner the believer is called to live the new life, so that Christ, not self, is seen abiding in him.

The power to effect this testimony is obtained by feeding upon Christ. There is no reference in this chapter to the Lord's Supper, which had not been instituted, when the Lord said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." This cannot refer to partaking of bread and wine, since the possession of eternal life constitutes the antecedent claim to the commemoration of the Lord's death in the appointed way.

We have here not an occasional, but a continuous and habitual act. It is the quiet appropriation of the beauties and graces of the Lord Jesus Christ. The very contemplation of the Lord of glory is formative, and brings our lives into correspondence with Himself.

This effect is not the result of conscious effort. When food is eaten the necessary assimilation of it by the body is not an act of will. It is a natural process operating automatically. So it is spiritually; we look upon Christ by faith as revealed in the word, and we become like Him. In ordinary life the force of the living example is fully acknowledged. And in the spiritual world it has its powerful influence in molding the Christian character.

In conclusion: the Son who is the only source of life is also its support and maintenance. Our part is to realize by faith the continual presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, and in proportion to the activity of this faith we shall be changed into the same image.

W. J. H.

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Most likely this text has not been proofread. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

The Sustenance of Life, Sustenance of Life, The: Part 1 (6:47-63)

Notes of an Address on John 6:47-63

In the previous chapter of John's Gospel we have the subject of the source of life; in the one before us the subject is the sustenance of that life. In point of its origin eternal life is the gift of God through our Lord Jesus Christ; but after its reception by the believer, comes the question of its maintenance and development. Life eternal in its heavenly range is in contrast with our first life which has its sphere here, its purposes and functions being earthly.

Now we learn in this portion of Scripture that the Son who gives eternal life is also its preserver. There is, therefore, in this fact a strong contrast with the conditions of Eden. Adam was distinct in his life and image from the animals around him, having received his life by the direct inspiration of the Almighty. He was constituted the supreme ruler of terrestrial things, and had free access to the tree of life. The means of preserving his life was, so to speak, in his own hands. But by disobedience he forfeited that life for himself and for his posterity. In contrast with this precarious tenure of life at the beginning the Giver of eternal life is also its Preserver. He bestows eternal life upon His sheep, and He guarantees they shall never perish nor be plucked from His hands.

The believer receives a spark of heavenly life. By the operation of the Spirit of God through the word a new nature is begotten in him—a life not previously possessed. Through this life a link is forged between the man here and the Father in heaven. By its means he is enabled in the power of the Holy Spirit to have conscious dealings with the Father and the Son. The Father's love and interest and guidance and help become to him perpetual realities. These things are known in spite of the weary days, keen sorrows, stern difficulties, searching temptations which oppose the new life and tend to overwhelm it, "things present" threatening to swamp things spiritual.

POWER NEEDED TO SUSTAIN LIFE

How then are we to make progress when we are in possession of eternal life? How is it to be kept secure and active? A great enemy presents counter-attractions and influences from without. There are evil passions smoldering within. There is opposition from every quarter. But we are instructed in this connection that divine love has provided efficient means for the maintenance of this life.

Indeed the same gracious loving Person who imparts eternal life supports and sustains it. It is by Him that the new life grows and develops. By Him it becomes vigorous and displays new traits of a heavenly character. Through energy supplied by Him the believer rises triumphant over his old self. Like Paul he can say, "Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." For the believer is placed in possession of this divine life that it may manifest itself in thoughts, motives, words and deed, which resemble Christ's.

A person having life eternal walks through this world reflecting the life of Christ. How is this effected? Some say by a course of rigid self-discipline whereby a man may rid himself of his evil dispositions; having ground down the old nature, the new shines out. But it is not so stated here. It is by feeding upon Christ that the eternal life is developed into strength and activity.

THE PASCHAL LAMB ROAST WITH FIRE

In connection with the subject of the appropriation of the Person of Christ as a means of sustenance for the spiritual life of the believer, the Lord refers to the miraculous manner in which the children of Israel were fed in the wilderness by the manna which came down from heaven. But food was provided for them at the commencement of their journey as well as during its progress. There was the paschal lamb for the chosen people before the manna came down from heaven.

The ceremony at the Passover included more than the blood on the door-posts. This was essential for the security of the people, since "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." By the blood, therefore, Israel was protected from the judgment which fell upon Egypt. Though in the vicinity death was ravaging every household the blood of the lamb secured divine preservation wherever it was sprinkled. And during the night watches the saved people were invited to make a meal upon the carcass of the lamb roast with fire. By this means they were to acquire strength for setting out upon their new journey to the promised land. When they subsequently reached the desert and still required food God gave them manna. And both the lamb and the manna are types of Christ.

The lamb roast with fire typifies our Lord in His atoning death. Fire is a frequent emblem of judgment. And the Israelite was thereby reminded that the judgment of Jehovah which brought death to the Egyptians fell upon the sacrifice of which they were invited to partake. It was particularly specified that the paschal lamb was not to be eaten raw nor boiled; it was to be roasted. The reason for this stipulation is clearly because in this manner only could it set forth the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Victim who endured God's avenging judgment against sin.

The initial food prescribed for the Israelites as pilgrims was, therefore, the roast paschal lamb. The Christian should begin there also. Many persons affect a regard for the Lord Jesus Christ altogether apart from His atoning death. He is to them a great teacher, a martyr, a political sufferer, but not a Vicarious Victim. And those who degrade the Lord's death in this manner can never derive any soul-strength from it. They lack the faith which appropriates the lamb roast with fire.

Hence the only accession of strength for the new life is gained by first feeding upon the slain lamb. In Him sin as an evil principle was judged by the fire of God: "He who knew no sin was made sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21). And sin is the cause of the believer's weakness, so far as experience goes. From indwelling sin spring evil desires. But the Holy One was "made sin." And in His death all that a believer was as a descendant of Adam was atoned for and judged. This is the secret of deliverance from its power.

We are not commanded to eradicate the inward sinful will. It has received its utter condemnation. This truth is foreshadowed in the type of the paschal lamb, and the apprehension of this aspect of the death of Christ is a source of spiritual strength.

THE MANNA

We may speak of the paschal lamb as the believer's food in a negative sense, since it shows us that the old nature is not a source of power for Christian walk, it being judged and set aside as irreparably evil. In a similar way, it may be said in typical language that the manna is a source of strength in a positive sense. For from the living Christ Himself we obtain direct supplies of energy for the pilgrim journey.

The manna represents the Lord who came into this world from above. He is the bread of God which came down from heaven. And while here He spoke of Himself as the "Son of man who is in heaven." It is important to remember that in the life of the Lord we have what is different from the lives of all mankind besides. He only of all men came down from heaven. This fact gave a character to His humble and dependent conduct such as was never seen before. The governing principle of the most elevated human conduct is an aim to do what is becoming to man. The familiar expression, "Be a man," embodies this idea. To be noble and dignified and truthful, to copy the salient characteristics of the world's successful men is the general ambition of the more thoughtful and earnest of mankind. But such aims, however laudable and proper they may be in themselves, are not essentially Christian conduct. Living the eternal life is the consequence of feeding upon the humbled Man in whom the life of heaven was displayed below.

The contemplation of Christ is the true inspiration for the walk of the faithful believer. In Him we have the Son of God incarnate in an evil world. Once and again the glory of the Godhead emerged momentarily through the veil of flesh. Upon the mount His countenance was transfigured before His disciples, and a Voice from the overshadowing cloud proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased; hear him."

We see that glory exhibited again in the sudden stilling of the tempest with a word. Further, there was a display of His essential glory at the grave of Lazarus, according to His own word to Martha, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

From these incidents we learn that a divine Person was present, capable of exerting infinite power in His own right, yet withal meek, lowly, humble, gentle, to an incomparable degree. The voice that silenced the howling storm checked the widow's tears and blessed the helpless babe. This is the Christ upon whom we are to feed as the origin and the renewal of our spiritual strength. There is no need to seek the ideals of poetry and philosophy. We have the noblest of examples, a divine Exemplar. God Himself as Man shows us the ideal life. With Him before us our emulation will be rightly directed.

(To be continued)

Christ the Source of Life, Christ the Source of Life: Part 2 (5:17-36)

The Man at the Pool

Here then we have the unique instance of the Lord singling out one from a number of sick folk, and putting to him the question, "Wilt thou be made whole?" Why is this case given? Because it is good for us to know that He possessed the right to help and to heal whomsoever He would. It is so still. In our prayers, for example, we have no rights before God. The rights are wholly His. He is gracious to hear and to answer, but He is supreme, and we have no valid claims upon His bounty.

The Lord's question awakened only surprise in the sick man. It was to him a strange question. From the countenance of the speaker he did not discern the Lord of glory. He only regarded Him as a man who might perhaps have kindness enough to stand by and put him into the pool at the proper moment. His thoughts rose no higher than this: "I have no man to put me into the pool," he said in reply. There was thus no recognition of the Lord. The eyes were dull, the heart heavy, the sensibilities blunted. The Son of God was speaking in solicitude; but there were no ears to hear. There was no appreciation of the Person who addressed him. In short, there was no spiritual life there.

This deficiency however proved no hindrance, for the Lord had come to Bethesda to supply all that was lacking in this case, in contrast with the provisions of the law. "If there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law" (Gal. 3:21). While the law was "weak through the flesh" the Lord rose above such limitations. In spite of the man's dullness, debility, and deadness, He bestowed upon him the gift of healing. He was acting here in His own rights as the Son of God.

Thereupon the word of the Lord went forth to the prostrate sufferer, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." Now with that word went a supernatural power which wrought a stupendous change in the hearer. He no longer regarded Jesus as a man who might peradventure put him into the pool. He now recognized Him as One whom he was bound to obey. The word of the Lord imparted new life to him. He believed. He obeyed. He was confident that the word which bade him rise was not spoken in mockery and that the ability to respond which he lacked in

himself would in some manner be supplied. He believed the Lord, and like millions beside, he was not made ashamed.

PERSECUTION BY THE JEWS

A great testimony for God was hereby rendered in the city of Zion. The Son acting in His Father's name avoids the temple which He had already pronounced to be no longer His Father's house, and visits the crowd of impotent folk waiting for one of their number to be benefited by the troubling of the pool. He selects an absolutely helpless and hopeless man who, in obedience to His command, carries his bed through Jerusalem on that very sabbath as a witness to the genuineness of the cure. But this was a witness to more than the power of Jesus; it testified also to the authority He possessed as the Son of God to abrogate the conventionalities of the law.

This act of grace by the Lord became a reason for His abuse and His persecution by the Jews. They repudiated altogether the claims He made. They sought to kill Him because He had broken the sabbath, and because He said that "God was His Father, making Himself equal with God."

This obstinate unbelief and opposition of the Jews gave occasion for the Lord to reveal further glories concerning Himself. Their blindness of understanding showed the desperateness of their case as a nation. Though they were well acquainted with the letter of the ancient oracles, they utterly failed to receive the Lord and His words, and this failure in the face of such exceptional testimony was because they were spiritually dead.

What then is the resource when there is such hopeless obduracy? What sort of a person can help in such circumstances where the powerlessness is that of death? Only One who can act for God without any compromise of the nature of God; and, more than this, only One who can act as God and with God. Hence the Lord said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Such a One then can only be God's own Son. He possesses more than a delegated authority, for in His own inherent right He can speak in His own authority. This He does, prefacing His words with the phrase characteristic of this Gospel, "Verily, verily, I say unto you" (verses 19, 24, 25).

THE SON CLAIMS EQUALITY WITH THE FATHER

The Lord in His answer to the Jewish cavils demonstrates His equality with the Father. This mode of reply is to be weighed. In respect of His work of mercy on the Sabbath, the Lord does not here refer, as in the other Gospels, to the case of David and the show-bread, nor to the priests in the temple, nor to the utilitarianism of the act justifying it, as when the life of a sheep was preserved. In this instance He calmly asserts His divine right as the Son of the Father.

The Lord then declared His glory as the Eternal Son, resting it upon three grounds. He showed that His Sonship appears—

(1) In His union and communion with the Father (verses 19, 20).

(2) In Himself as the Quickener of whom He will (ver. 21).

(3) In Himself as the appointed Judge of mankind (ver. 22).

In the first place then, the Son is seen to be acting in the Father's name. His competency to do this is shown by His union with the Father. And the union is implied in the statement, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." His adequacy is also further affirmed by the communion existing with the Father; "for the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel."

Had He not said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work"? To work in such partnership involves equality with the Father; for while not acting independently, i.e., "of Himself," He is competent to do all the Father does, and to do it all in the same manner, that is, divinely. The Son does not only what He is told to do, but also what He sees the Father do. Consequently, in the life, the actions and the words of the Lord Jesus Christ we have the fullness of the Father's heart of love, otherwise inaccessible to man, brought into view in this world. It is indeed cause for marvel when we reflect that in that lowly Man passing patiently onwards through a path of obloquy we have a perfect exhibition of the Father's love on high. So that looking upon and studying Him we learn the essential features of God's ineffable grace and truth.

And this subject we can only learn in communion with the Father and the Son. There is a great difference between learning a thing from a companion and learning it from a book. Affection and regard play not a small part in the former process. This part of the New Testament, which from one standpoint may seem abstract and dreamy, enters into the very marrow of Christian life because the Person of Christ stands there revealed in His highest glory. Through and in Him the believer learns his most valuable lessons.

The Christian life is not a mere code of ritualistic obedience to a series of specified commands, the fulfillment of certain duties defined with precision. Such was the Mosaic method, where you have not the operations of a new life so much as the repression of the old life. The law came with the coldness of an "army order"; it lacked life. The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.

Eternal life brings us into relationship with the living Word—a Person to whom we may come and appeal directly, telling Him our sorrows and our joys, and find comfort and peace in the telling. For this privilege, true from the beginning, is not now obsolete, except so far as we make it so by our neglect.

We now come to the second point: the Son is the Giver of life. It has been observed that He is in no whit inferior to the Father. What God does, the Son does in like manner. What a Savior for sinful men! In addition, we are taught that the Son exercises the divine function of bestowing life. "As the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." And this function He exercises in His lowliness as Son of man: "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (ver. 26). This attribute was displayed in His ministry. Everywhere He went He had life in Himself. There could therefore be no death in His presence. He possessed a store of life-giving energy, to the power of which the daughter of Jairus, the widow's son of Nain, and the beloved Lazarus were monuments.

It is true that in all these vivifying acts, He was the subject One, but still in the place of subjection He had what no creature could have, His sovereign rights, and could give life when and where it pleased Him: "the Son quickeneth whom he will."

In the third particular, also, the Son is said to exercise a divine function. Who but God can in the absolute sense (and this is the only possible sense here) judge men? And we read, "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father."

This authority to judge mankind is conferred upon Him "because He is the Son of man." But being Son of God He is at the same time competent in His own right to execute this high function. In the days of His flesh He was in this dark and evil world as Heaven's Light to expose, not to judge, sins, to forgive sins not to condemn the sinner. But we learn that He who was sent to atone for sin is He who will be sent as the Executor of divine judgment, all judgment being committed unto the Son.

Hence the call to honor the Son in His proper excellency. Those who do not by faith see His glory in His humiliation will be compelled to witness and acknowledge it when He is manifested in His own glory and in His Father's. This glory will be so transcendent in character that it will perforce bow all stubborn hearts and knees in reverent homage to the Son of man, the Father's fiat being that all should honor the Son even as they honor Him.

The believer recognizes this equality in worship and adoration. Whatever God is, the Son is also. This we freely and gladly acknowledge, and God is jealous of this, since it was the Son who suffered for sins. God was glorified in Him. And "if God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself" (John 13:31,32).

[W. J. H.]

(Continued front page 203) (To be continued)

Christ the Source of Life, Christ the Source of Life: Part 1 (5:17-36)

The General Character of John's Gospel

The subject of eternal life is peculiar to the fourth of the Gospels. And that this peculiarity should be found there will not be a matter for surprise when the character of this Gospel is remembered—a character which is easily observed on comparison with the others. For while the Synoptics, as the first three are often called by way of distinction, set out the varied glories of Christ as the One who was deputed, in mercy and righteousness, to establish God's order in a world of disorder and sin, the disciple "whom Jesus loved" was inspired to write upon a more exalted theme. To him was assigned the high and holy task of presenting, in His divine nature, the Person of Him who came forth from the Father. In other words, John gives us the Godhead side of the marvelous and mysterious Incarnation, not stated in the abstract terms of a philosophical disquisition, but exemplified for our spiritual apprehension in the words and actions of Jesus the Son of God.

In this Gospel, then, the children of God have the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ, and receiving this by faith we receive Him, and receiving Him we receive Him that sent Him. Yet it is well to remember that this reception on our part must be in a progressive sense. Nathanael may exclaim in wondering rapture at a transient vision of His glory, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel"; and Simon Peter, illuminated by the revelation of the Father may confess, "Thou art the Son of the living God." But this knowledge of theirs must deepen and develop before either the one or the other can attain to that stage of Christian growth at which a person is said to know Him who is from the beginning (1 John 2:14).

THE INFLUENCE OF THIS GOSPEL UPON THE NEW LIFE

It is a matter of common experience among the simplest of believers that the Gospel of John possesses an irresistible attraction above other parts of Scripture. And this attraction, apart from the recognition of the all-absorbing Personality who shines in radiant glories throughout its chapters, is inexplicable. The new nature turns instinctively to Him who is its source of light and life and love. Hence we always in the devout reading of this Gospel discover heights and depths altogether beyond our comprehension. We feel an inexpressible sweetness which is nowhere else. We recognize that its study brings us into a sphere of elevating and ennobling influence such as we love. Why is this so? Is it not because we have here the dignities and glories of the Lord Jesus Christ? The record of His majesty captivates our heart's affections. We cannot but rejoice to learn the greatness of Him who comes so near to us in His love. We delight in the knowledge of the glory of Him in whom we trust. We see that He is not one of ourselves, not one of the saintly personages of divine history, not one of the mighty angels from above, but the Son of God, the Word become flesh. And He is, therefore, One whom, in His ineffable love, we cannot but worship and adore.

The only-begotten Son has revealed the Father and His love. Clearly we could not have penetrated heaven to obtain the knowledge of this love. Neither is such a task now needful, since this love in its glory and heavenly perfection has been brought down to us in the Person of Jesus Christ. And to know Him and the Father who sent Him is eternal life.

This knowledge comes to us through the Scriptures. Hence it is that the Gospel of John which testifies of the Son as the Revealer of the Father exercises such a powerful influence upon the spiritual life. The perusal of it develops the essential quality of deep reverence. It is not sufficient to love, we should also honor a loved one. And for all believers there is need that the habit of reverence should be acquired and practiced. For we are exposed in a greater degree than we sometimes realize to the serious danger of undervaluing the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are liable to depreciate His work for us and His care for us. But the scriptural record affords a needful corrective of these natural tendencies, the Gospels and Epistles of John setting the Lord before us in the very atmosphere of heaven, as it is written, "The Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3:13). When we see Him we see the Father. When we hear Him, we hear the One who is in the bosom of the Father. And such experience as this cannot but affect the most deep-seated springs of our inner spiritual life.

THE NATURE OF LIFE UNKNOWN

We have seen that there is an intimate relation between the subject of eternal life and that aspect of the Incarnation revealed through the apostle John. It is clear that apart from the possession of eternal life there is no apprehension of the Father nor the Son. The sheep know the Shepherd, but then He gives them eternal life. The fact of this gift is declared plainly enough, but the nature of the life bestowed is, in its essence, unrevealed and therefore remains unknown. That portion of Holy Writ which is so full of references to life eternal as possessed by the family of God contains no definition of the nature of this subtle principle. What the new life is abides a mystery inscrutable to psychological and every scientific inquiry, just as physical life, that is, the life which is the common possession of mankind, baffles all research into its nature and origin. Nor can the enshrouding veil be lifted even in the case of the lowliest organism. God has reserved, to Himself the knowledge of the mystery of life, whether in man or in monad. This is true in the natural order of things, and it is certainly true in the matter of spiritual life.

However, we do not find that this ignorance of the nature of physical life in any way interferes with the faithful discharge of its duties and responsibilities. Were such knowledge necessary in spiritual things we may be sure it would have been revealed. And it is worthy of remark that the many references to this subject in scripture are made in terms which are addressed not so much to the intelligence as to the heart. The various statements are not susceptible to analysis and definition like the theme of a philosophical treatise.

Life itself—the fact of it, the truth of it—is the main thing. And the knowledge of this we receive on the authority of the word of God. We know we are born of God not only by the subjective evidence of our own love to God and to the brethren (1 John 3:14; 5:1), but by the objective testimony of the record that God has given of His Son.

The truth of eternal life is the truth of our present life. It is the basis of our being now children of God. And this life is in the Son. As to the old creation it is true that in God we live and move and have our being, and as to the new creation our life is hid with Christ in God.

THE SOVEREIGN RIGHTS OF THE SON

We are now brought to the theme of the chapter before us. For in John 5 we learn that the origin—the source—of divine Life is the Lord Jesus Christ. This life may be and is utterly beyond our comprehension, but we may derive much comfort from the knowledge that it originates with the ever-living Son. And it is as the Quickener that He displays Himself in this connection. Moreover, in this act of quickening, which is essentially a divine one, He claims to exercise His own sovereign right—“the Son quickeneth whom he will.”

Now the sovereignty of our Lord is prominently displayed throughout this chapter, and indeed is especially noticeable in the incident of healing with which it opens. The person healed was one of a great company of afflicted folk, all of whom were desirous to avail themselves of what relief there was to be obtained at the troubling of the waters of Bethesda. But the Lord chose to go to this company, without any invitation, so far as the record goes. And He went among them as One who had His sovereign rights in this world, making a selection from the crowd according to the good pleasure of His own will.

We must remember that this man, desperate and pitiable as his case was after thirty-eight years' suffering, was not thereby entitled to demand relief from God. Neither had he physical strength to seek Him who came from heaven to render relief. But the Lord sought him where he was. In this He was exercising His right. So on another occasion He demanded the use of an ass with the simple statement of His paramount rights: “The Lord hath need of him.”

But this is altogether an exceptional instance; for throughout the Gospels we have many examples of individuals coming to Jesus and seeking some favor from Him, and when the case was stated the Lord readily gave more even than was asked. And if crowds came He would help and bless them all. There was mercy for any and for all.

[W. J. H.]

(To be continued)

Bible Treasury: Volume N12, Another Comforter (14:16)

In John 14:3 we have the Lord's coming again in bodily presence to take His own to be with Himself; but in verse 18 we have His spiritual coming to us now. Prior and preparatory to the latter announcement, He tells of the coming of the Holy Spirit (ver. 16).

The Lord was going away from His disciples and they were therefore very sorrowful, but He tells them here that His very going would be a gain to them—during His absence He would be with them more constantly than in the days of His flesh (see 16:7). The sisters of Bethany, when Lazarus was sick, mourned that Jesus was not there; but we never have to mourn that He is not with us in our time of trouble, for He is always at hand. Now His bodily presence was to be removed from them, but in compensation He promises to send the Holy Spirit: “I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter.” These are His words to them; thus He becomes the harbinger of the Holy Ghost. John the Baptist had foretold the immediate coming of the Lord Jesus; He Himself foretells the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word here used, which may be literally translated Paraclete, means even more than Comforter. We need comfort assuredly during our journey through this world, but we need other services too; all we need, the Paraclete can and will supply.

During those three years the disciples had been with the Lord, they had learned to turn to Him and depend on Him for everything, to come to Him in every distress. Now He was going away, and they felt desolate, but He promised to send them another Comforter, who should be to them all that He had been, and who would abide with them, not for three years only, but “forever” the Spirit of truth. The world would not receive Him, because “it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him,” but we know Him, for the Lord said, “He dwelleth with you, and shall be in

you.”

After the Lord's resurrection He appeared to His own, to Mary at the sepulcher, to the disciples in the upper room, to the two going to Emmaus, to the disciples at Olivet; but the world knew nothing about these manifestations: so now with the Holy Spirit. “He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” He is here to reveal Christ to us. The Lord Himself will come to us in our need “I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you” —but it is only by the agency of the Holy Spirit that we realize His presence. We cannot tell how the Lord comes to us; we cannot explain His coming to others, but we know He does come, for we have experienced it, and it is the Holy Spirit who reveals His presence to us.

The enjoyment of these great privileges, however, is contingent upon our faithfulness and obedience. Hence we read, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”

We know what His commandments are. “Do this in remembrance of me” is one of them. You will say this is a privilege—that it is a request which the Lord makes of us. So it is; but it is a command too, for it is the Lord who speaks—the One who has a right to command. To those who love Him and keep His commands, He promises to reveal Himself in a very special way— “I will manifest myself to him”

Judas asks how the Lord would manifest Himself to them and not to the world and then the Lord goes further, saying “If a man love me, he will keep my word”; not His commands only are in question this time, but the whole tenor of His life. He refers to one who not merely wishes to keep His actual commands, but to please Him in everything (compare Phil. 2:3, “Let this mind be in you”). The Lord says of such a one— “My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with Him.” Thus one loving and obedient heart becomes the abode of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the shrine of the Holy Trinity is in the heart of one that loves the Lord. But we read, “He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings.”

The Holy Spirit would also work upon the memories of the disciples and revive thoughts and words of the Master (ver. 26). He also works with ourselves. Everyone who has been for any time in Christian fellowship and Christian surroundings has usually within his heart a great store of the words of Scripture and of holy associations. The Holy Spirit will often bring to our remembrance what He has said to us, in the assembly or by the Lord's servants, so that it gives us just the help we require in our time of need. The Lord said, “He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”

W. J. H.

Bible Treasury: Volume 20, Lord's Coming, Not the Saint's Departing, The (14:3)

It is deplorable to think that the sweet and comforting promise of the Lord to His saints before His departure is so little valued by those for whose daily encouragement it was given. “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

One would suppose the terms of the Lord's promise are so precise, so positive and withal so welcome to those who love Him, that they would be eagerly grasped, and tenaciously held in all their sweet literalness. But on the contrary carnal imagination intrudes upon the domain of simple faith and distorts the words of the Lord into a meaning quite apart from the truth. Many godly souls persuade themselves to their own detriment that the Lord means that at the decease of the saints, He Himself will be present to convey them to the mansions above, to the place He has gone to prepare for them.¹ This is only so far true in itself that there is no interval between being “absent from the body” and being “present with the Lord.” But it is only blinding the eyes and wresting the scripture to import such an idea into the words of the Lord in John 14.

If this coming is merely spiritual as misguided men will have it, then His going away was spiritual too. For the Lord links the two in an unmistakable manner. “If I go I will come again.” And the angelic testimony to the apostles on Mount Olivet was not less emphatic, nor less explicit. “This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Now none can deny that the ascension of the Lord Jesus was literal and personal. And the same One that went will return and in like manner. Is it difficult to receive these simple words of scripture? If words mean anything at all, the Lord would cheer the hearts of His desponding disciples by the thought they shall be with Him where He is. But this does not at all convey that the Lord's comfort consisted in telling them that He will be with them in all their trials. This is truly so, as the blessed Master said elsewhere, “Lo, I am with you alway.” But the apostle nevertheless declares whilst we are “at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:6). And here the Lord says that the result, the very object of His coming, is “that where I am, there ye may be also.”

But mark that this blissful reunion is inseparably associated with His coming “again.” He had come before to His own (John 1:11). He promises to come again for His saints. If His first coming was personal, His second will be no less so.

For a time He had been with them in the world. He was now about to leave them and go to the Father. And this period of His absence on high would after an unnamed interval be terminated by His coming again to receive them to Himself. Then they would be with Him as truly as He was with them that night in the upper room.

But the question may be interposed whether saints who have passed away are not even now with the Lord. And scripture is clear and decided in the affirmative. The Lord's assurance to the converted robber on the cross was “To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). This unailing word was undoubtedly fulfilled that very day. The disembodied spirit of the justified malefactor was blessed beyond compare in

the presence of the Lord of grace.

But this was departing to be with Christ rather than the return of the Lord Jesus, such as we have in John 14. So the apostle speaks in his epistle to the Philippians, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). And later in his ministry he writes, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. 4:6). Nothing short of a special personal communication from the Lord could have enabled Paul, like Peter (2 Peter 1:14), to speak so confidently of his own decease. But the very fact that he was in this respect an exceptional case confirms that the general hope of the saints was not of departing to be with Christ, but of the Lord's coming to receive them unto Himself.

It is true therefore that the saints who have put off the earthly tabernacle are even now with Christ and "far better" than when in this world. But it is not to be inferred that they are "with the Lord" in the sense of 1 Thess. 4:17, or John 14:3. The concomitant events, described in the epistle, utterly preclude any thought of its reference to passing into the separate state. Thus we read (1) the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, (2) with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God (3), and the dead in Christ shall rise first: (4) then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds (5) to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 1 Thess. 4:16, 17. So far from departed believers being already "with the Lord" in the sense here mentioned, they compose one of the two classes mentioned—the dead in Christ.

Further, it is evident that when the Lord spoke of the disciples being with Him where He is, He meant not the spirit only, but body, soul and spirit complete (1 Thess. 5:23). Hence the bodies of the sleeping ones are raised, and the bodies of the living ones changed at His coming (John 11:25, 26; 1 Cor. 15:51-55; 2 Cor. 5:1-9; Phil. 3:21). It should be remembered that the Lord Jesus presents Himself in the valedictory chapters of John's Gospel, as going on high as the perfect Man. It was unprecedented that a Man should be in glory. Old Testament saints were in bliss, as far as their spirits were concerned, but not glorified (which is inseparable from the body in scripture). But the same Jesus that was crucified rose from the dead, ascended into the heavens, and was glorified at the right hand of God (Acts 2), in accordance with His own prayer, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me (along) with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5). In consequence of His finished work, He entered the glory of God as Son of Man (Acts 7:55).

In the light of this thought, we must read John 14. It was as Man He was going into His Father's house to become an object of faith. And because He would be there as the glorified Man, they could be there also. None could come unto the Father, but by Him. He was going to the Father as the very pledge of their going also, and that not in a partial way, their bodies sleeping in the dust, but all together and all complete, possessing bodies of glory like His own (Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:3), bearing the image of the Heavenly (1 Cor. 15:49). This constitutes our hope. We wait not for the dissolution of this earthly tabernacle, but for the instantaneous assumption of the house which is from heaven, which shall be ours whether we wake or sleep at His coming to take us. W. J. H.

The Resurrection and the Life, Resurrection and the Life, The: Part 2 (11:19-46)

Notes of an Address on John 11:19-46

(Concluded from page 304)

THE WORD OF HOPE

Before the Lord's arrival at Bethany four long days had passed, and during those days the anxious, sorrowing women had one source of consolation. The Lord sent them a word of assurance. He told their messenger, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God that the Son of God may be glorified thereby." This word was therefore carried to the weeping anxious women—the sickness was not unto death, but for the glory of God.

The faith of the women was tried by this delay. The Lord waited in apparent indifference, and did not go to the comfort and help of these distressed ones; though He sent them His word of assurance. And after all was not His word a sufficient basis for trust? He gave them His guarantee that the glory of God would be the final result of their brother's sickness. However unable they were to understand how this could be, the promise was given to sustain their hearts until the moment of deliverance came.

This history represents a condition of things which still recurs. And our great solace in the hour of trial is the word of the Lord. Some do not exercise faith until they are well out of their difficulties and sorrows. Then they are apt to exclaim, "Ah, I knew all would be well." But up to the moment of deliverance they had been torn with doubts and fears. Yet there is the plain, general promise, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"; though we seldom, if ever, see at the time how they are working together for good, any more than the sisters at Bethany saw how their brother's sickness and death could be to the glory of God.

God's word then is given us for the strengthening of our faith. It is a sure means of comfort, for comfort signifies making the heart strong to endure. It enables the believer to lay hold upon his resources in God and to trust in them, the result being the possession of peace of heart in the midst of the most trying circumstances.

The disciples in the storm saw the winds and the waves stilled by the word of Jesus. Their agitated minds were then set at rest, but they might have been so before, for they were equally safe when the waves were raging. Our great difficulty is to view such matters in the abstract, and see the future result in the present. Confidence seems easy when we consider either the troubles that are past or that are to come; but when we are face to face with them it is not so simple. However it is during the trial of our faith that the fine gold is brought to view upon the surface (1 Peter 1:7).

In due time the Lord arrived at Bethany, and the truth of resurrection was demonstrated in the case of Lazarus, and death was robbed of its prey. Martha ran to meet Him, saying, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died. But I know that even now whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give it thee" (verses 21, 22). She believed Jesus was the Messiah, and she associated His personal presence in the chosen land with long life for the righteous. The Lord said to her, "Thy brother shall rise again." But Martha's answer was, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (verses 23, 24).

In each of Martha's replies she stated what was absolutely true, but she found no comfort. She lacked the knowledge of the right truth. True comfort is based upon the particular truth suited to the circumstances of the moment. For this purpose the word of truth must be rightly divided. It is no question of rule or routine, but the Lord Himself in our trials and difficulties brings out of the Scriptures what shall be for our immediate benefit.

Clearly from what Martha said she did not realize that the Son of God was able to give life, to abolish death, to overcome him that had the power of death. So when the Lord spoke of her brother rising again, she said, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

This was a view that only tended to intensify her sorrow. Resurrection seemed so far off; it seemed long to wait until the last day. But the Lord had something to reveal which would suit her present need. In effect, the Lord showed that the key to her difficulty was with Himself. She was looking at the resurrection as an act of power at the end of all things. But Life was there before her. Life had come into the world, for "in him was life." The Son was the source of it, the bestower of it; He possessed it as truly as He was a Man from Nazareth. He was the Resurrection and the Life; and it was not at all a question of God answering prayer as in the case of Elisha and the Shunammite's son.

But though what the Lord stated was a recondite doctrine, He gave it what perhaps may be called a personal form. He simply set Himself before her as the object for her heart. If it were a question of resurrection He was competent to undertake it and carry it through. Death introduced no difficulty to Him. One greater than all the universe beside said to Martha, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

The Lord Jesus Christ therefore at the graveside issued His command, "Lazarus, come forth," and the dead man came forth at that word. Previously He had declared, "The hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice [the Son of man's] and shall come forth." He was then speaking of a day that is yet to come. But here at Bethany He demonstrated that His power was then present, and the bystanders witnessed the dead brother of Mary and Martha respond to the voice of Him who was the Resurrection and the Life.

THE GENERAL APPLICATION

The Lord in this revelation communicated a great truth, but one which is of general application. It was the habit of His ministry not to confine the scope of His words and deeds to the particular case in hand. Here the Lord came to restore by resurrection Lazarus to his sorrowing sisters, but the words He spoke have a far wider range than that domestic circle. The fact that He was the Resurrection and the Life was spoken not only for Martha and Mary, but for all who should believe in Him.

In His presence a dead person should live since He was the Resurrection, and in His presence a living person should never die, since He bestowed what is called "life more abundantly," that is, a life that death cannot touch. Hence He said, "He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die" (verses 25, 26, R.V.).

The doctrine of this passage is more fully expanded in the Epistles, where the effect of the coming of the Lord upon those who believe is set forth in greater detail. When He comes for His saints it will be in connection with the redemption of the body. If a believer is dead or "asleep" as scripture terms it, His resurrection-power will be exercised. The Lord will speak; and the effect of His call will be that the dead in Christ will rise and come forth from their graves.

Thus Lazarus is a type of the saints who will be "asleep" when Christ comes. Others beside Lazarus were dead and lying in their sepulchers at Bethany, but the Lord only addressed the one whom He knew and loved. He made a selection among those who were in the grave. And when the Lord descends from heaven with a shout, only those who know that voice will respond. Those whom the Shepherd knows and who know Him will hear His voice and will issue from their graves in the glory of the first resurrection.

Believers who will then be alive will likewise be affected by His coming. Only the order will be that which is indicated by the Lord's words—the Resurrection and the Life. First the dead will be raised; then the living will be changed, for those living and believing in Him will never die according to His promise. Those therefore who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord will not have the precedence of those that have fallen asleep in Christ.

The apostle dwells upon this theme when writing to the Thessalonian assembly (1 Thess. 4:13-18). It was a great concern of theirs that some of their number had "gone before" into the grave; and they feared that they would, in consequence, miss the joys of Christ's coming. But the reverse was the case. The departed would gain and not lose. They would rise first and then the living would be changed. The victors over the grave would have the precedence of the victors over death. And this order is in perfect correspondence with that of the Fourth Gospel.

At first sight we might imagine that Life and Resurrection is a preferable sequence, since the Son speaks of giving eternal life to the believer now. And this of course is true. Only a different line of things is before us here. The Lord is dealing with man's body—the corporeal nature. Therefore the exercise of His power is first of all in the way of resurrection.

But there was a greater wonder than resurrection, and this the Lord unfolded when He said, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believeth thou this?" Martha was a believer truly, but she did not understand the Lord's meaning in this revelation. However she did trust the Lord, and this trust she expressed in her reply, "Yea, Lord; I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (ver. 27). Though she failed to penetrate the depths of meaning in this truth, her great safeguard was her faith in the Lord which indeed qualified her to participate in the great blessing when He comes.

The Lord passed on to exemplify the truth of what He had uttered concerning Himself as the Resurrection. He raised Lazarus, but before He did so He showed sympathy to the full with those who were suffering in this sore trial. He felt the sorrow of this havoc which death had wrought at Bethany. Here were two sensitive sisters bowed down and broken-hearted by their brother's untimely decease. Death had robbed them of their loved one. And the Lord entered fully into the intense sadness of this bereavement. In His groans and tears He displayed such feelings of agitation that even the Jews said, "Behold how he loved him" (verse 36).

Some might possibly conceive that such manifestations of sorrow on the part of our Lord were needless, seeing He was about to raise Lazarus. But think what we should have missed if there were no record of His groaning and shedding tears. Now we may see how He knows "our frame." As the prophet said of Him, "He bare our sorrows, and carried our infirmities." He not only ministered to the sick and afflicted, but He did so with the truest and most effective sympathy.

If we seek to sympathize with the suffering it is needful that we should take their sorrows to ourselves. Merely to speak a word of condolence to others is not genuine sympathy. We must appropriate the trials of others and carry them upon the spirit. For such a service we need to have the Spirit of the Master within us, learning first His comfort for ourselves as displayed here, and then ministering the same to others.

In the consideration of this passage we have seen some glimpses of its beauty and instruction, but we may be sure that in every further contemplation of it we shall behold something fresh and something comforting. W.J.H.

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Most likely this text has not been proofread. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

The Resurrection and the Life, Resurrection and the Life, The: Part 1 (11:19-46)

Notes of an Address on John 11:19-46

In this chapter we have set before us another view of the comprehensive subject of life which runs throughout this Gospel. We shall notice also that the profoundest teaching with respect to resurrection and to life (the latter being intrinsically of even superior importance to the former) is developed in connection with a common event of human history.

This feature, too, is a characteristic one in the Gospel of John. The heavenly is here closely linked with the earthly. The common events of daily life, such as hunger, sickness, bereavement and the like, are associated with some of the profoundest truths of revelation, showing that the scriptures are intended to be a source of heavenly light for the practical uses of man's life. However they may be abused, they were not given to provide the readers with subjects for vague theorizing or with matter for formulating religious creeds, but to enable persons to meet bravely, and to understand, the hard facts of daily existence. For life is full of facts which seem cruel and inexplicable apart from the light afforded by God's word. It behooves us, therefore, to study the scriptures with the object of discovering the clue for unraveling the many baffling circumstances in which we so often find ourselves.

When God in heaven looks down upon this world so full of tangles, as it seems to us, all things are clear to Him. He has a definite scheme. But it is only His word that will enable us in any measure to catch His purpose, to get some glimpse of His plans. Failing this, however, we may be assured that His eventual aim is good. All earthly events are converging to a final goal of beneficence. And the revelation which offers this assurance is the antidote to the great lie current in the world that all things are working together for evil. This lie emanated from Satan in Eden, and its effect remains among men today. Even pious persons, when things seem to go awry, are apt to think so. Many Christians, when hardly treated, are inclined to think so. Hence the value of God's word in its assurances to the contrary, for by believing its statements on this head we may be spared much needless anxiety and sorrow.

THE BEREAVEMENT

The story in this chapter is a pathetic one, and its details, while of common occurrence, contain those perplexing elements to which allusion has been made. And it is most interesting and instructive to observe how the subject of eternal life is interwoven with that of the bereavement.

In the previous chapter the Lord presented Himself as the Good Shepherd. He spoke of His sheep who were called to cut themselves adrift from the old associations of Judaism and to follow Him. Now to the Jew the ordinances and the institutions of Moses seemed of all earthly things the most stable. But the Shepherd called His sheep by name to follow Him outside the Jewish fold, and thus to leave all the ordinances in which they trusted. In exchange He gave them His word and His promise. And His solemn promise to every sheep was eternal life, and complete immunity from destruction: "I give unto them [His sheep] eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

This gift was superior to anything the legal enclosure could offer. The Jewish fold was not so secure as the Good Shepherd's hand. He who holds the universe has strength to hold His sheep in the face of every foe. And His promise assures the possession of eternal life to every sheep and protects them equally from corruption within and from foes without.

In this chapter we have the case of one of Christ's sheep visited by death. This was a startling calamity in the eyes of the pious Jewish sisters, because the legitimate hope of the godly Israelite was length of days. The reward of godliness according to divine promise was long life in the land,

Hence from the point of view of Mary and Martha, it seemed inexplicable that their brother should be cut off in the prime of life from the happy home of Bethany. Why had death come up "into their windows," and ruthlessly plunged the devout God-fearing sisters into bereavement and mourning? Though Lazarus was one of Christ's favored sheep, the king of terrors, the foul enemy of mankind, had

despoiled them of their beloved brother. It was a sorrowful trial to them; and it is one incessantly repeated before our eyes, perhaps in our homes. How often the godly seem selected to be stricken down! Consider indeed that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself was cut off in the midst of His days.

How were the sisters to understand this calamity? How were they to reconcile the death of Lazarus with the Lord's promise with respect to eternal life? Lazarus, so much beloved by them, so needed in the family circle, their earthly source of comfort and joy, was suddenly taken away. And the Shepherd, though appealed to, did not interfere to save His sheep from an untimely death. They had expressed their allegiance to Him, yet He did not hasten to save the sick man. They could see nothing before them but a life of mourning and sadness for one loved and irretrievably lost.

The Lord came to these broken and bleeding hearts, and in His beautiful manner disclosed to them a new and profounder view of eternal life, while at the same time He restored to them their lost one. He showed them that in spite of appearances death cannot touch eternal life. He, in fact, revealed Himself as the Resurrection and the Life, not only by way of doctrine but by a practical demonstration at the graveside.

ITS PRACTICAL VALUE

It is helpful to observe how this great truth is here associated with circumstances of sorrow and bereavement in such a manner as to exercise a beneficial effect upon all the redeemed. As the grief-stricken hearts of the sisters were comforted, so all who are similarly situated may be soothed, encouraged and strengthened by the details recorded here.

In this chapter another precious feature of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is made prominent. We see His perfect and matchless sympathy with the tried and suffering women. The Lord performed an act of infinite power, but He did so in the gentle and sympathetic manner which was characteristic of Him. And His demeanor in this respect stands out the more markedly in this Gospel where He is presented as, the Eternal Son. We do not find Him entering abruptly into this scene of sorrow and restoring the dead man with a word, as when He quelled the stormy forces of nature on the lake of Galilee.

Here we see irresistible might breaking down the prison-bars of death, but with it is coupled the wondrous force of sympathy. The Lord in the gentleness of His infinite power comes to the weeping women, enters into their sorrow, weeping with them as He wipes away their tears. How marvelous the sight to behold the Son of God shedding tears!

THE HOME AT BETHANY

The subjects of this narrative formed a particularly-favored trio. Their home had become, if we may so say it, the Lord's home in Judea. In the other Gospels His ministry in Galilee is prominent, even as that in Judea is the main topic of John. And it is recorded that while He taught in Jerusalem He sought rest and refreshment in Bethany at the house of Lazarus and Mary and Martha. This was the circle into which death entered.

At the commencement of this chapter a parenthesis referring especially to Mary is introduced in the narrative. We read in the second verse, "It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair whose brother Lazarus was sick." So that the event fully described in the following chapter is here historically anticipated. Why is this? The reference seems to be something more than a note of identification of Mary of Bethany. And I would suggest that the sentence is placed here because it was the sad experience related immediately afterward in this chapter which supplied the circumstances under which Mary learned how to act as she did at the feast in Simon the leper's house.

That Mary had learned something from the Lord even previously to this bereavement we may gather from references made elsewhere to His former visit to Bethany. Mary then sat at His feet and heard His word. She was then taught something concerning the true nature of Messiah's mission, and on this occasion she learned something further concerning the greatness and grandeur of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mary possessed a different temperament from her sister. She was a quiet, meditative person, and, while Martha rushed at once to meet the Lord at His coming, she remained in the house. We cannot always anticipate what these quiet, self-restrained persons will do, but they frequently act rightly because they have received the needful training in seeking to learn the mind of Christ.

Martha had a more active disposition than her sister, and, was naturally in a great hurry, a busy person with no time for reflection. When the Lord first came to Bethany she prepared things for His reception and His becoming entertainment. This was good service, and was not reproved. But Mary was conscious that it was the event of a lifetime for the Messiah to visit the house where she was. Such moments therefore were so precious in her eyes that she desired to utilize them in hearing the many things He might choose to tell her. She sat down at His feet to listen.

Now in her sorrow Mary felt that it would be best for her to wait for her Master's word. She sat still till He called for her. Then she went, and saw, as Martha did, His power over death as the Resurrection and the Life.

Six days before the passover the fruit of Mary's training at the feet of Jesus and at the opened grave of her brother was made visible: Then it was that in the midst of the feast at Bethany she anointed the Lord beforehand to His burial. She was not one of those who subsequently sought the body of Jesus at the rich man's tomb. She knew He had risen. By the restoration of her brother she saw that He was the Resurrection and the Life. How could the grave hold Him who had said, "Lazarus, come forth." If she would anoint Him, she must do so before His burial, for she was persuaded she would never find Him in the sepulcher. She acted becomingly therefore at the feast, and all the world is now aware of the fitness of what she did.

MISTAKEN THOUGHTS

If time permitted we might profitably consider the mistakes of various persons recorded in this chapter. Not that these blunders are presented for the entertainment of other persons, but that it may be seen how graciously the Lord Jesus corrected the errors of those about

Him, giving them at the same time credit for what they intended to do. The knowledge of this is a great comfort to a person who is acting in sincerity before the Lord, honestly seeking to do His will. It is only a self-satisfied person who supposes that any act of his is in itself worthy of the Lord's acceptance. The person doing a perfect action and offering it to the Lord for His acceptance is yet to be found. However, though after our best service we are all "unprofitable" servants, the Lord accepts according to the intention of the heart.

When the Lord spoke of going to Bethany, blundering Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (verse 16). Regarded in the light of the previous revelations which he and others had received concerning the Son as the Giver and Sustainer of life, the apostle's remark was foolish and unbelieving. But he was sincere in his desire to accompany his Master at all risks, and the Lord did not upbraid him.

Similarly the Lord knew the impulsive character of Peter, but He also knew his ardent love and devotion. Outwardly there was an incrustation of self upon which Satan worked, but inwardly there was an intense affection for the Lord. Peter meant what he said in his passionate outburst, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death" (Luke 22:33), but he did not know his own strength. And the Lord arranged that in due time he should lay down his life for his Master according to his own expressed desire.

The Shepherd, the Sheepfold, and the Sheep, Shepherd, the Sheepfold, and the Sheep, The: The Sheep (10:24-30)

John 10:24-30.

This section relates in a summary manner to the characteristics of the sheep of Christ, as contrasted with the unbelief of the Jews. The latter display their utter blindness to all the Lord had previously said and done, by their question, "How long dost thou make us doubt?" "If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly" (ver. 24). In reply He charges them with positively rejecting both His words and His works, as chapters 8. and 9. of this Gospel respectively show in greater detail. He told them Who He was, but they believed Him not. His works bore witness to the same, but neither did they believe them, because they were not of His sheep.¹ The very fact of asking such a question at such a juncture was full proof of their spiritual status.

The Lord thereon turns from the unbelievers to the believers. He speaks of the sheep of which He is at once the Owner, the Shepherd, and the Guardian. They had heard His voice (ver. 27). He had cried unto Israel, "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Psa. 95:7, 8); but the mass of the nation would not hear, and accordingly their foolish hearts were darkened. There were however some who heard the voice of the Son of God, and they that heard lived (John 5:28)'.¹

Of such He says, "I know them." But to the faithless ones He will say, as to the foolish virgins, "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not" (Matt. 25:12); and to many who have prophesied and cast out demons and done many wonderful works in His name, He will profess "I never knew you; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity" (Matt. 7:22, 23).

Moreover, those who heard the Shepherd's, voice followed Him, as He said before in a somewhat different connection (ver. 4). Here His words are, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me." Not so the rich young man, who anxiously inquired of the Lord, how he might inherit eternal life. Though outwardly moral and inwardly sincere, he absolutely failed to answer to this claim of the Master. "Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me" (Mark 10:21). But he went away grieved. Whatever else he may have possessed, he undoubtedly lacked this distinguishing characteristic of the sheep of Christ. He was not constrained like the disciples to leave all and follow the poor, the lowly, and the despised. Nazarene; it is therefore clear he had not heard the Shepherd's voice. To him the path, with its apparent darkness and chilly gloom, was forbidding and repellent, as indeed it must be to all who have not the light of life (John 8:12).

The Gift of Eternal Life

"I give unto them eternal life." The Good Shepherd, Who laid down His life for the sheep, gives eternal life to the sheep. He had come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10); for it is the will of Him that sent Him, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, should have everlasting life (John 6:40); and the Son had received power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him (John 17:2). Other passages in this Gospel show that it is given consequent upon faith in God and in Christ. (See chaps. 3:15, 16, 36; 5:24; 6:47, 54). But here all mention of faith is omitted that our gaze may be concentrated upon eternal life as the priceless dower of divine love and goodness.

While the effects of the possession of eternal life are many and blessed, it forms in itself the essential basis of the intimate relationships of the children of God. Foolish is it, and fruitless of aught save wild and dangerous speculations, to attempt to analyze this precious gift. The subtle terms, in which it is expressed and referred to, effectually elude and baffle the researches of mere prurient curiosity after explanation and definition. The unraveled mysteries of even the natural life should serve as a sufficient warning to those who would intrude into what is not revealed concerning the spiritual life. It ought not to be forgotten that to exceed the scripture tends to destruction, even as ignorance of it tends to debility. Not one inspired word on this or any other topic can be overlooked without loss, neither can one word be added without the gravest peril.

The Security of the Sheep

"They shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand." It has often been pointed out that this promise is of a double character, assuring the saints against both corruption and disruption, against internal decay and external foes, against their own harmful weaknesses as well as the rapacious power of the enemy.

Truly, "the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe" (Prov. 18:10). And this unqualified promise is such an impregnable citadel for the timid believer. For the Good Shepherd herein pledges Himself and the honor of His glorious name² that the very

feeblest of the flock shall never by any possible means perish. So, speaking to His Father of the twelve, He says, "Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost (same Greek word) but the son of perdition "3 (John 17:12).

Further, the place of safety for the believer is not symbolized by an earthly fold as in former days, but by the hand of the Good Shepherd. There, in the shadow of His hand (compare Isa. 49:2; 51; 16) are they securely hidden from every foe. That hand of invincible might (which redeemed the ancient people from the iron bondage of Egypt, preserved and defended them through the desert and brought them into the promised land flowing with milk and honey) will environ the frail and feeble sheep and protect them from every attack of the enemy. Though the wolf seeks to ravage the flock, the Good Shepherd leads the sheep of His hand (Psa. 95:7) into those green pastures where they may peacefully feed beside the still waters.

The Father also graciously concerns Himself in their guardianship. "My Father which gave them me is greater than all; and no one is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one." This unity of interest in those who received the Lord is also shown in John 17:11, 12. The Son there prays the Father to "keep in thine own name those whom thou hast given me," adding "while I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name." And when the Shepherd was smitten and the sheep were scattered, the Father turned His hand upon these little ones, according to the prophecy of the Spirit (Zech. 13:7) and the prayer of the Son (John 17); for it was not His will that one of the little ones should perish (Matt. 18:14).

Thus the Father and the Son constitute themselves the Protectors of those who trust them for salvation. Could the ground for confident assurance be made firmer? Away with those who depict the child of faith as scantily-attired, clinging with numb fingers to a slippery sea-girt rock, while dashing waves threaten every moment to engulf in a watery grave. Scripture teaches us to think of such a one held in that hand, in Whose hollow the waters were measured (Isa. 40:12).

W. J. H.

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Most likely this text has not been proofread. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

The Shepherd, the Sheepfold, and the Sheep, Shepherd, the Sheepfold, and the Sheep, The: Therefore Doth My Father Love Me (10:17-18)

THEREFORE DOTTH MY FATHER LOVE ME.

We have here an instance, unparalleled in the history of all time, of One who afforded a motive and an occasion for the Father's love. The unique character of God's gracious love towards sinners is elsewhere described as triumphing over the extreme repulsiveness of its objects (Rom. 5:8). Here, on the contrary the object of love is in perfect accord with the One Who loves; for the Lord declares of Himself, "Therefore doth My Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again" (John 10:17). In this act was unqualified obedience to the commandment He had received of His Father. And it was by such obedience that the Father's name was glorified and His love drawn forth. For the Son's obedience was unvarying in His life and, moreover, consummated in His death, as the word says of Him, "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). Small wonder, then, if such unrivaled perfection of thoughts and ways should become (speaking after the manner of men) an adequate cause for the satisfaction and complacency of the Father Who alone could estimate its true worth.

This divine delight in the Messiah was foretold in the prophets. For instance, Jehovah says through Isaiah, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth" (Isa. 42:1). In like manner, it was announced by the angelic host to the shepherds of Bethlehem, when on that memorable night they praised God and said "Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, good pleasure in men "1 (Luke 2:14.) The first man, together with everything God made, was pronounced very good (Gen. 1:31); but the Second Man, the Lord from heaven, is herein declared to be the object of the fullness of divine delight as well as the medium of its display to others. Subsequently a voice came from heaven, not then of angels, but of the Father Himself, not once only but twice, "This is my beloved Son; in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). And when, in obeying unto death, He finished the work given Him to do, His soul was not left in hades (Acts 2:27), but, by His exaltation to the throne, He was demonstrated to be the One Whom God delighted to honor. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him" &c. (Phil. 2:9).

It is well to remind ourselves in considering these divine testimonies to the excellence of the Man Christ Jesus, that they were given not to command our admiration, but rather our worship. We are called to admire many a worthy in the Old Testament as well as the New; but we are to worship One only, Him Who though fully man was never less than God. It was when Peter sought to class the Lord Jesus with Moses and Elias, that the voice came from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear Him." In His very lowest stoop of grace, as well as in the height of His exaltation, no rival so much as appears. In all things He has and must have the pre-eminence.

Now the witnesses we have heard, the prophet, the angels, the Father Himself, all combine to show that the words uttered by the Lord in John 10:17 are, in point of fact, an echo of what had already been declared of Him. In comparing, however, the act of laying down His life as spoken of in verse 17, with verses 11 and 15, a difference is at once noticed. The Shepherd first spoke of laying down His life for the sheep. In this aspect, His death is given as an irrefragable demonstration of His love and devotion to the flock as well as His substitution for them since they had all gone astray.² But in verse 17 the sheep are not so much as mentioned.

It is here a question of what the Father sees in the death of the Son. It was to Him a source of love and delight, a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savor. So that this phase of Christ's death is the Antitype of the burnt offering (Lev. 1). There as well as here is seen that, when the Son yielded up His life, the Father found therein an abundant and acceptable portion. Compare also Eph. 5:2.

POWER TO LAY IT DOWN.

It has often been remarked in these pages, as well as elsewhere, how fatal it is to the true understanding of scripture to set one passage against another, and to endeavor in an excess of misdirected zeal, to effect a kind of reconciliation by adding to or subtracting from the plain statements of the Word. It is in fact, only the faith which accepts the words of the Holy Ghost as they stand, that is the true solvent of so-called Biblical difficulties. This much is prefaced because some have professed to see a sort of contradiction between this word, "I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again," and such passages as follow, "This Jesus hath God raised up" (Acts 2:32), "Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom. 6:4), "Christ... being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18). In regard to these and similar places, it should be needless to say that there is no necessity whatever for adjustment of any kind, but faith is called to reverently receive the whole as the truth of God. So that while the mysteries of the Trinity are and must be inscrutable to the creature, the believer clearly discerns, because it is revealed, that in the mighty act of resurrection, Father, Son and Holy Ghost each bore a part. And these various aspects are severally given in suitable connection with the context and with the design of the Infallible Inspirer of Holy Writ.

The connection of this declaration of the Lord's (John 10:18) with the general design of the fourth Gospel is evident. For He here speaks as the Son of God Who indeed is God. And throughout John He is made to appear in this character. He takes a place with regard to His life and death, that a mere man could never take without the most daring presumption and the most blasphemous usurpation of the supreme authority of God. To the Jews the Lord said, speaking of His resurrection, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). And again, referring to His atoning death, "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). It is also surely not without its significance that in this Gospel alone it is recorded that, when the armed men sought Him in the garden, He, not waiting to be found of them, but as the Giver-up of His own life, went forth and said to them "Whom seek ye?" The betrayer's kiss of the synoptists is passed over and replaced by the holy dignity of the Son Who knew all things that should come upon Him. From the majesty of Him Who said, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself," the constables with their swords and staves recoil in abject impotence, prostrated to the very ground (John 18:4, 5). In like manner, the Incarnate Word announced from the cross with regard to His own work, "It is finished." Only One could so speak of what He had done and so yield up His spirit (Mark 15:39). It was that One Who said, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

And surely it is the possession of this right to which He thus asserts His claim as the Son, that so incalculably enhances the value of His act in laying down His life in obedience to the commandment He had received from His Father. The creature, as such, could never have the power of choosing to do the will of his Creator³; when man obeys, he does no more than his duty and is therein no more than an unprofitable servant (Luke 17:10). The Son, however, being equal with God, was able to announce His own acquiescence in the divine will and purpose, saying, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). It was His prerogative, in contrast to the mere creature, to thus signify His assent. A servant could not choose to be other than subject to the will of his lord. But it was the will of the Lord of all to become the Servant even to the laying down of His life; hence the immeasurable worth and acceptability of this incomparable act.

We hear of another in this Gospel, who spoke of giving up his life. Simon Peter, in the impetuosity of his character, consumed with zeal for his beloved Master, exclaimed on the very night of His betrayal, "I will lay down my life for thy sake" (John 13:37). For the son of Jonas did not then understand that the very reverse would be the case according to John 10:11-15. Neither did he then believe what the Lord immediately told him of the instability of his own heart, that, before an hour or so had passed, he would be denying with oaths and curses that he so much as knew the gracious Master Whom he now seemed prepared to follow to prison and to death. But so it was that a share in such a disgrace and death proved too much for one who trusted in his own strength.

Still, though he fell so shamefully, the Lord credited the desire of his spirit. And after his restoration he was called by the risen Lord to follow Him, and assured of the death by which he should glorify God (John 21:18, 19).

The Shepherd, the Sheepfold, and the Sheep, Shepherd, the Sheepfold, and the Sheep, The: The Door (10:7-16)

THE DOOR.

After the break indicated by the sixth verse, the Lord resumes His discourse concerning the sheep and their relationship to the Shepherd. In the previous verses He had spoken in a general way of His own advent into the sheepfold. He now proceeds to reveal what a bountiful provision there is in Himself for the poor of the flock who welcome Him. In Him the sheep would find their all.

He was indeed the Shepherd, but He was also the Door of the sheep (verse 7). And it cannot but be noticed that the Lord, here and in ver. 9, abstains from saying that He is the Door of the fold. There is however no need to resort to hazardous conjectures as to the significance of the omission. The context shows that the Israelitish fold with its legal system and fleshly ordinances was virtually abandoned. The Shepherd leadeth His sheep out. But not a word is heard of a rival fold. The truth is that a new order of things was at hand, into which the sheep might enter through the Door, that is, Christ. But the hour had not then come to make this known. Neither were the hearers able to bear such an announcement. Hence the general terms employed which allowed fully for the future revelation of the wide display of the grace of God to Jew and Gentile alike.

Even here, in verse 9, it is intimated that the blessing was not to be restricted to Israel. He had announced Himself as the Door of the Jewish sheep; but the gracious truth is repeated with unlimited scope. "I am the Door; by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and shall find pasture."

Thus the Lord calls the faithful in Israel, nay in every place, to find their sufficiency in Himself. He definitely substitutes Himself for the ancient earthly fold. He does not proclaim Himself as the Door to another earthly system,¹ but says "I am the Door"; and if curiosity inquire of what He is the Door, love rightly surmises there is naught beyond the Door besides Himself.

SALVATION, LIBERTY, AND PASTURE.

In Christ alone the sheep would find suited salvation. They had suffered from false shepherds who pillaged the sheep, from the thief who came to steal and to kill and to destroy, and from the wolf who ravaged and scattered the flock. But they needed to be saved from more than these. They had inward faults as well as outward foes. They had all gone astray. Everyone had turned to his own way. And upon the One then speaking to them Jehovah would lay the iniquities of them all. As the Shepherd, so soon to be smitten by the sword of divine judgment on account of the flock, He guarantees salvation to any who seek it at His hands. "If any man enter in, he shall be saved."

Further, in contrast with the bondage gendered at Mount Sinai, they should be brought into the liberty wherewith Christ maketh free. Sin and Satan held men in hard and bitter slavery, and the law of Moses could remove the masterful power of neither the one nor the other. But at the cross the Lord Jesus annulled the power, not of one only, but of both. This emancipating fact, after its accomplishment is fully unfolded by the Spirit in the Epistles. Here the Lord only says they shall "go in and out"; for it was the Spirit's office to chronicle the glorious effects of redemption, it was the Son's mission to perform the gracious work.

Moreover, He promises they shall find pasture. It was a special charge of Jehovah against those who, of old, professed to be shepherds of Israel, that they fed themselves and not the flock. But not so the Good Shepherd. Now that He had come, the sheep should no longer want. He would make them lie down in green pastures, and lead them beside the still waters. According to Ezekiel's prophecy He was Himself that "Plant of Renown" which God had promised to raise up for His sheep, so that they might no more be consumed with hunger in the land (Ezek. 34:29). Thus the Lord Jesus is Shepherd and Door and Pasture and All.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

By means of a single epithet of the simplest character, the Lord contrasts Himself with all the false and unworthy hirelings who had gone before. He is the Good Shepherd, and "good," in that absolute sense which applies to God alone (Luke 18:19). Among men there is none good, no, not one. But the goodness of the Shepherd of Israel was such as would undergo the supremest test. No love could exceed His. He would lay down His life for the sheep.

This phrase, "laying down the life," as an expression of love, is characteristic of John, being found in the Epistle as well as repeated in the Gospel (see John 10:11, 15, 17; 15:13 John 3:16). The same transcendent act is also given in Rom. 5:8 as the proof of God's love. "God commendeth his (own) love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

But while Paul and John use the same unparalleled fact to demonstrate that truth which would otherwise be beyond human conception, the difference in their standpoint is plainly observable. The apostle of divine righteousness emphasizes the sin and guilt of man. He points out that it was when we were "ungodly," "sinners," "enemies," that Christ died for us. He thus displays the beauty of God's grace upon the dark background of human guilt. But the apostle of divine love dilates upon the Person of the One Who thus died. He enforces his words by the consideration of Who He is and not so much of what man is. The Holy Ghost by Paul sums up what we were in a few pregnant words; but the main theme of John's Gospel throughout is the glory of the Only-Begotten of the Father Who laid down His life for us. Paul often discourses from the brazen altar, and we weep with shame at ourselves as we consider that He died for such as we. But John leads us into the holy place, and there, before the veil, effulgent with the Shechinah from the throne beyond, we worship with reverent joy as we learn that such an, One died for us. We cannot afford to neglect either the one or the other aspect of this blessed truth. In yielding up His life for the sheep, the Lord showed Himself the very reverse of the menial shepherds before or since. Their slender interest in the flock vanished at the first roar of the lion or growl of the bear. Such pastors as they were bargained for wages not for wolves. Their care was only for themselves and not at all for their charge. Indeed this was the general character of those of old who were set up to feed God's sheep. Even David through his folly caused 70,000 of Israel to fall of a pestilence (1 Chron. 21.). On account of Solomon's sin, the kingdom was rent in twain in the days of his son Rehoboam. Hoshea filled up the measure of iniquity until Ephraim was carried captive by the Assyrian to the uttermost parts of the earth. Under king Zedekiah the people of Judah were removed from their own land to serve seventy years in Babylon. Of such rulers, Jehovah said "Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" (Jer. 23:1.) But the Good Shepherd had now come. The sheep were His own; He loved them and laid down His life for them. MUTUAL KNOWLEDGE. "I know mine own and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me and I know the Father." So the Revised Version reads, showing the true connection between verses 14 and 15, which is not so apparent in the A. V. It is perhaps a matter of little surprise to learn that the Lord knoweth them that are His: but it is a matter of great wonder and of greater thankfulness that the sheep should know the Shepherd. And it is upon this particular manifestation of divine life in the soul that John is inspired to dwell in an especial manner. Of the world the Holy Ghost says, that it "knew Him not" (John 1:10, 1 John 3:2); and in that which is most properly described as the "Lord's prayer," the Son declared "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee" (John 17:25; compare 16:3). So of the Pharisees in this chapter. "They understood (lit. knew) not what things they were which he spake unto them" (John 10:6). But when speaking of those who are "not of the world," we read "The Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true" (1 John 5:20). This knowledge characterizes the babes as well as the fathers (1 John 2:13, 14). And it was exemplified in the case of Simon Peter, when he said "We have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God" (John 6:69. R. V).

This reciprocal knowledge of the Good Shepherd and His sheep is here most strikingly compared" even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father." Without pretending to say whether this refers to the measure or the manner of our knowledge, or to theorize in any way with regard to that which seems a fitter subject for meditation than for exposition, one remark may be permitted by the way. We may surely gather from this analogy that the knowledge of Christ's sheep in this respect is neither uncertain nor obscure; for it is the knowledge of a Person, not about Him. Knowledge concerning the Lord is undoubtedly progressive; but knowing Him is that which marks the veriest lamb of the flock, as not being of the world which knows Him not. One of the robbers at Calvary recognized his Lord in the One crucified at his side; and said, "Lord [Jesus], remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." Herein was he distinguished from his fellow malefactor, both in this world and the next. Verily, it is not so much what we know as Whom we know. W. J. H.

clickbible.org