

John - Commentaries by John Alfred Trench

Spiritual Food: July 2008, Bread of God: John 6:43-69, The (6:32-69)

There are three positions in which the blessed Lord is presented in the doctrinal portion of this chapter: first, as come down out of heaven to fulfill the will of the Father who sent Him; then, as giving His flesh for the life of the world; and last, as ascending up where He was before. In the first He is the bread of God — not merely the bread God gives, but that which He feeds upon Himself. Now, for the first time, man's path was found opening out in Christ in all its perfection before the Father, whose eye and heart only could enter into it. What perfect dependence, obedience, devoted love to the Father was there — a life governed only by His Father's will in every detail of word and action, with the absolute refusal of every other object but His Father's glory. No wonder the heavens opened to Him and the Father's voice declared His perfect delight in Him. Thus He was the bread, or food, of God's own joy. But how wonderful to know that it was not to be for Himself alone: "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." In His infinite grace the Father would have others enter into His estimation of the Son whom He loved. He was the bread of life, and he that comes to Him by faith shall never hunger or thirst. This leads us to the second position that the Lord took — that He who was the bread of God might be the bread of life to us.

The more perfection that shone out in Him among men, the more the state of every other man came out in His presence. The light shone in darkness: We saw no beauty in Him that we should desire Him. "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" was the answer of the Jews (vs. 42) to the gracious revelation that it was the will of Him who sent Him that He should lose nothing of those given Him, and that every one who sees the Son and believes on Him should have eternal life and be raised up into the proper sphere of that life when the end of the present age had come. This moral incompetency to enter into all that made Him the sealed One (vs. 27) of the Father's delight was the last and conclusive proof that there was nothing in us for God and the absolute necessity of the early sentence of God upon man, "The end of all flesh is come before Me," so that in order that any should eat of the bread come down out of heaven and not die but live forever, we read, "The bread that I will give is My flesh which I will give for the life of the world" (vs. 51), and the essential condition of our having life in Him is that we eat His flesh and drink His blood (vs. 53).

Up to this point in the Gospel there had been the objective presentation of the life in Him, but now it is the question of our subjective entering into it. This depends upon our having been brought to bow to the judgment of God, not only of our sins, but of all that we are according to the flesh, in His death. It is surely by faith, but having eaten His flesh and drunk His blood [the verbs in verse 53 are of one definitive act] expresses more than this. It is that we have solemnly identified ourselves with Him in the death He endured for us, and which ended before God and for faith all we were as children of Adam. We have, as in the type of the sin offering, laid our hands upon the victim's head and owned His death to be ours. It is a definite point to which we have to be brought in the soul's history, never to be gone back from: Deliverance from the dominion of sin is found in it.

But the eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood is not simply a thing of the past — that we have done with — for now begins the necessity of the habitual feeding upon the death of the Son of Man that we may possess eternal life in all its reality as a life of communion with the Father and the Son. As His death is thus before our souls, we are extricated and practically delivered from all that is of the flesh in us, and of man and his world, that the Lord Jesus had to carry down to death under the judgment of God. How could we, in the presence of the infinite sufferings of Gethsemane and the cross, tolerate anything in ourselves of what involved those sufferings for Him who, in such unfathomable love, gave Himself for us? With His death thus applied to our souls continually, there will be nothing to hinder our enjoyment of that life of divine and heavenly relationship which is "eternal" (vs. 54). But dwelling or abiding in Him, as the continuous realization of our being in Him, depends also upon our eating His flesh and drinking His blood, which is true meat and drink.

And now verse 57 brings us into what verse 33 had presented to us: "He that eateth Me." It is no longer simply His death, but He Himself personally known as the food and joy of our souls, who is the Bread of God. We could only have part in that wonderful Bread by identification with Him in His death, but it is He Himself upon whom now we can feed. "As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by [or on account of] the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by [or on account of] Me." He lived for nothing else but the Father: The Father was the whole reason of His existence here, the absorbing object of His life. And so, as He rises before our souls in all His perfection, more and more entered into as we feed upon Him, He will become the absorbing object of our life: We shall live only for Him.

At the close, the Lord intimates that He would ascend up where He was before. Of what immense importance for us, for it is thus that all the precious truth has become available for us. The light of the glory in which He is has been shed back on all He was in the lowly, perfect path of His humiliation and upon the cross in which God has been infinitely glorified and man's history closed in judgment, so that nothing but Christ should remain before our souls in this blessed communion of divine joy and satisfaction.

May we each know increasingly what it is to eat His flesh and drink His blood, and feed upon Him personally who is the Bread of God.

J. A. Trench

Blood and Water: January 2017, Water in the Word (3:5)

Water is the symbol of the Word of God applied to the soul, in power, by the Spirit of God. Compare the expression in John 3:5, "Born of water," with James 1:18, "Of His own will begat He us by the word of truth," and with 1 Peter 1:23, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed,

but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." In Ephesians 5:26 we find the water definitely identified with the Word in the expression, "The washing of water by the word."

Water purifies; hence by the use of the symbol more is conveyed than if it had been simply said, "Born of the word." It includes the effect produced, as well as the instrumentality used of God in this, the beginning of all His ways with us in grace.

In the types, water has as large a place as the blood. Both flowed from the pierced side of the Lord Jesus in death (John 19:34). This is the historic order, and in it the blood comes first, as the basis of everything for God's glory and our blessing. In the order of application to us, as John in his epistle (1 John 5:6) gives it, the water comes first. "This is He that came by water and blood ... and it is the Spirit that beareth witness." The Spirit applies the Word to the conscience, by which mighty operation of sovereign grace we are born absolutely anew. The effect in us is the conviction of sins, and when faith rests on the testimony of the Spirit to the value of the blood of Christ that cleanseth from all sin, He (the Spirit) can take up His dwelling-place in us to be the power of the enjoyment of all that we have been brought into by the water and the blood, and the Christian position is then complete.

But fastening our attention on the water, it is important to see that there is a double application of what it represents, as in John 13:10: "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." There is first, as we have seen, being "born of water and of the Spirit" (John 3:5); this answers to the first washing mentioned here, and, as it is the communication of a new life and nature, cannot be repeated; we are "clean every whit." Nor is this by any change in the character of the flesh in us, for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," and there can be no purification of it. The Word applied by the Spirit to our souls carries with it the sentence of death upon all that is of the flesh. God could do nothing with it but end it in judgment (Gen. 6:13), a judgment He carried out for faith in the death of His Son (Rom. 8:3). Thus the water was found where the blood was in His death. It is, on the one hand, the end of the flesh in total condemnation and, on the other, the introduction of a life in which we can live to God and enjoy Him forever.

But we have to pass with this life through a defiling world, where all that meets the senses tends to hinder communion with Him who is our life. Hence the need of the second application of the Word, symbolized by the Lord's touching service to His disciples in John 13. He girded Himself with the towel, and, pouring water into a basin, He began to wash their feet and wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. It was, as Jesus tells Peter, that we might have "part with Him" when He is gone, that is, as having departed out of the world to the Father (vs. 1). We have to go through the world out of which He has had to depart, and therein lies all our need. We are liable to contract defilement at every step, or at least that which would bring moral distance between our souls and Him. He knows how to apply His Word to bring back the soul to the enjoyment of His presence, in His ever faithful and unfailing love, that there may not be even a shade of reserve between us and Him. That first action of His Word by which we were clean every whit in the divine nature could never be repeated, but this is needed continually. Nor does He leave us to apply it to ourselves ("if I wash thee not"), though He may use any of us who have learned in the school of His grace, in this privileged service to others (vs. 14).

It is of interest, as helping to bring out the distinction all the more clearly, that the Lord employs two different words in this tenth verse according to their clearly defined usage in the Greek version of the Old Testament. "He that is washed" (or "bathed"), as applicable to the whole person, is the word *louo*, used of the washing of the priests on the day of their consecration (Ex. 29:4). "Needeth not save to wash [nipto] his feet" is that used for the washing of their hands and their feet in the laver at the tabernacle door every time they went into the sanctuary (Ex. 30:18,21). And the words are never interchanged. But, in noting this, we must remember the difference between preparation for priestly entering into the holy places, as in the Old Testament, and this wonderful service of the Lord for us, that we may have the constant enjoyment of His presence as having gone to the Father.

May our hearts be more deeply affected by the love that would not leave a spot on our feet, and may we yield ourselves up to the searching action of His Word upon us, when it is needed that He should apply it, rather than be content to walk at a distance from Him, clinging to something that maintains that distance, to His dishonour and our own incalculable loss.

J. A. Trench (adapted)

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