

John - Commentaries by Algernon James Pollock

Divine Titles and Their Significance, I Am the Light of the World (8:12)

(John 8:12)

How could the heavenly light have shone, unless He, who was the Light of the world came into it, and lived His life among men? We read, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." (John 1:4).

What true light has man today, but that which comes from above? We read of that Eternal Life, which with the Father from all eternity, being manifested in due time to our Lord's disciples in His own blessed Person.

And what did they do with that Light? We read that men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. That the light shone in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:5). They crucified the Lord of glory. Such is man! Such is your heart and mine, but for the grace of God.

Divine Titles and Their Significance, I Am That Bread of Life (6:48)

(John 6:48)

The first two words assert Deity, the last four could not be true unless our Lord had entered into manhood, and died on the cross in order that He might be to us the bread of life. We read, "I AM the living bread, which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give him is MY FLESH, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:51).

His life had to be given up sacrificially in order that life might be the portion of every believer on the Lord Jesus Christ. What profundity we see here, something so evident that the humblest believer can take it in, yet the ripest saint can only feel he has touched but the fringe of the mighty ocean of God's love.

Divine Titles and Their Significance, I Am the True Vine (15:1)

(John 15:1)

Here we have a symbolic figure of believers being in communion with the Lord in order that their lives should be pleasing and fruitful to God. In order that this may be so, it is necessary that believers should be the possessors of a new life, a spiritual mind, for the carnal mind is enmity against God, and they that are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom. 8:7, 8). We read, "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is IN HIS SON." (1 John 5:11).

Every believer has through infinite grace received the gift of eternal life, but this life is in God's Son. So our Lord, who is the life, the Source of life, the inherent Possessor of life, can communicate this Divine life, without which there can be no understanding of Divine things, and no fruit for God. Our Lord said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall LIVE." (John 5:25).

The vine symbolizes our blessed Lord; the branches the believers, and just as the branches bear fruit, as abiding in the vine, so believers bear fruit, as they abide in Christ. Abiding in Him they bear much fruit. This is to the glory and pleasure of the Father, symbolized by the Husbandman, who purgeth every branch that beareth fruit, that it may bring forth more fruit. (John 15:2).

The Lord is the true vine in contrast to Israel, the unfruitful vine, that produced no fruit for God. (Psalm 80:17). Turning away from the fruitless vine we get the prayer, "Let Thy hand be upon the Man of Thy right hand, upon the Son of Man, whom Thou madest strong for Thyself." (Psalm 80:17)

This prayer was answered in our Lord Jesus Christ. There can be no union with sinners. Divine life could not be communicated save as the atoning death of our Lord satisfied all the claims of God's holiness as to the whole question of sin. Only by a new and Divine life imparted to believers could the symbolism of the vine and the branches be fulfilled.

Comforted of God, Now and Hereafter (13:7)

"What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." (John 13:7).

These words of our Lord, as we all know, refer to His washing the feet of His disciples. Behind that lowly act a hidden meaning lay which should be made quite plain to them one day. So when the work of redemption was accomplished, and Christ had taken His seat on high, and the Holy Spirit had come down, many a mystery was made clear, and many a thing told out that could not be told before.

But we are going to deal with these words in other connections now. Many a dear child of God is walking in a rough and rugged road, and passing through circumstances hard to understand. He sees no reason why he should be dealt with thus. With anxious heart he looks up and asks, " Lord, why is it thus with me?" And the answer is, " What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." With this he must be satisfied, and wait with patience the clearing of the clouds.

For example, the little home at Bethany, where Jesus was always welcome, had been thrown into great sorrow (John 11). Lazarus was sick. Now "Lazarus" means "GOD MY HELPER." To whom, therefore, should they turn in their distress but to Him who had come so near to them in grace? Short was the message which the sisters sent: "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." And there was every reason to believe that the Lord would hasten to their relief. For Jesus loved Lazarus, and if earthly love delights to do its best, what would not the love of Jesus do? So everything encouraged them to look for an early deliverance. Yet it did not come! Their expectations were not fulfilled. The sisters' message was received, but after the swift feet of the messenger had departed Jesus abode " two days " in the same place where He was. This delay must have sorely tried their hearts, nor could they divine a reason for it. And all the while Lazarus grew worse, and grim death knocked loudly at the door. In vain they looked for Jesus. He did not come, and their flickering hopes were finally extinguished when their brother breathed his last. Nevertheless, though they knew it not, His hand was all the time upon the helm, steering the ship aright. In the whirlwind and in the storm He has His way, and the clouds from which they shrank were but the sure sign that He was near, for they were "the dust of His feet." (Nah. 1:3).

"What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter " are words which might have been well addressed to the dear friends at Bethany in their most anxious hours. Their confidence in the love of Jesus was possibly unshaken, but this long and fatal delay was most perplexing. Could they, did they believe that all things were working together for good? that every detail was under the control of One who never erred, and whose love for them was deeper than the sea? We cannot tell. "Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died," are words which seem to come from hearts not quite submissive and at rest. But when the " hereafter" came, and the purpose of God in this sickness was fulfilled, and Lazarus was given back to his sisters, and the glory of God and of Him who was the Resurrection and the Life was seen in cloudless and broadened vision, then how gladly would they have owned that God's way was perfect, and that blessed is the man whose hope in Him is steadfast!

"Satisfied the way He taketh Must be always best."

And we may look at Paul, too, after he had been caught up into Paradise, where he heard unspeakable words and received visions and revelations of the Lord (2 Cor. 12). Such high privilege exposed him to a subtle snare, which at the time he did not see, but which the Lord knew, and from which He would save His faithful servant at all costs. For this "a thorn in the flesh" was needful. There have been many conjectures as to what the thorn was, but they are only conjectures at their best, and therefore of no value. God has not told us, so it is not necessary that we should know. But it was something hard to bear—as men speak—and which Paul earnestly prayed might be taken away. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter," is a saying which applies to such a case as his. Think of that dear saint and devoted servant of Christ! Think of him as he bows his knees to the Lord, and asks in fervent prayer that this distressing infirmity might depart from him! But no answer came, though he may have long and patiently waited for it. Again he prays, and again no answer. For the third time he prays, then the silence is broken, the tarrying time is over, the suspense is ended, and the answer comes. But there is no taking away of the thorn—that is left to rankle, to be felt always, and always to be endured with pain and patience. The answer to Paul's cry came in a form which was better than the removal of the distressing thing: "And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Shall we, then, think it strange if the Lord's way with us is at times after the same order, though the pattern of it may be different? Have we prayed for deliverance, and as yet no hand has been stretched out to deliver? It is the tarrying time, the " two days " of the Bethany story. Alas! with many of us these testing times show that our faith is but a slender plank that will bear but little strain. Let none of us think that the Lord has forgotten us. A mother may forget her child, but He will not forget us. Our names are ever before Him, graven on the palms of those hands once pierced for us at Calvary. The present moment may be the "now" when we know not; tomorrow may be the "hereafter" when we shall fully know our Master's end and aim.

And if, as in Paul's case, the answer to our oft-repeated cry comes not in the way of deliverance; if instead of removing the trying thing, He speaks to our hearts in tender, gracious power, saying, " My grace is sufficient for thee," shall we not bow submissively to His perfect will, assured that His choice is wiser and better than ours? May we not even go further, as Paul did when he said, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me "? It is a great thing to say, for glorying in our infirmities goes far beyond bearing them with patience and submission. But His grace enables His weak and suffering saints thus to speak when He is fully trusted and His will accepted in perfect acquiescence. We rest, then, as one rests on a bed of down, and we gladly leave ourselves in His hands as we hear Him say, " What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

Divine Titles and Their Significance, I Am the Resurrection and the Life (11:25)

(John 11:25)

It is very clear, that if our Lord could claim to be the resurrection and the life, it meant death for Him on the cross. And further this claim carries with it the thought that He died representatively, that He has become the resurrection, so that all, who put their faith in Him, may have part in His resurrection, inasmuch as when He will shout the summoning shout at His second coming, all the saints, who have passed away, will be raised as well. So we read, "Jesus said unto her, I AM the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead,

yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believeth thou this?" (John 11:25). "If the Spirit of Him, that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." (Rom. 8:11).

That is, the holy indwelling Spirit of God is the pledge to the believer that our Lord is the resurrection and the life; that is, in Him there is a resurrection unto life for every believer in His name.

Thus our Lord comforted the sorrowing Martha, and would comfort each one of us today.

Comforted of God, Desert Way, The (11:35)

We thank Thee, Lord, for weary days,

When desert streams were dry;

And first we knew what depth of need,

Thy love could satisfy.

Days when beneath the desert sun

Along the toilsome road,

O'er roughest ways we walked with

One That One the Son of God.

We thank Thee for that rest in Him

The weary only know;

The perfect, wondrous sympathy

We needs must learn below.

The sweet companionship of One

Who once the desert trod;

The glorious fellowship with One

Upon the throne of God.

The joy no desolations here

Can reach, or cloud, or dim;

The present Lord, the living God,

And we alone with Him.

We know Him as we could not know

Through heaven's golden years;

We there shall see His glorious face;

But Mary saw His tears.

The touch that heals the broken heart

Is never felt above;

His angels know His blessedness,

His way-worn saints His love.

When in the glory and the rest

We joyfully adore,

Remembering the desert way,

We yet shall praise Him more.

Remembering how, amidst our toil,

Our conflict and our sin,

He brought the water for our thirst,

It cost His blood to win.

And now in perfect peace we go,

Along the way He trod,

Still learning from all need below

Depths of the heart of God.

Comforted of God, Comfort in Sorrow (11:6)

(John 11:6)

The truest heart that ever loved

Could give its object pain -

Could bear to see the suffering

That brought the untold gain.

The mightiest hand that ever moved

Could wait to bring relief -

"Two days" apparent heedlessness

Of nature's deepest grief.

Would they have missed that sacred thing -

His sympathy—His tears -

Scene on which breaking hearts have leaned

For nineteen hundred years.

The wonder-working word that gave

Their loved one back again,

Seems scarce so precious as the groan

That proved He shared their pain.

O heart that loves so perfectly!

Thou often waitest still,

And blessed are the emptied hearts

They sympathy can fill.

Divine Titles and Their Significance, I Am the Good Shepherd (10:11)

(John 10:11)

To provide a door, an entrance, into the blessings of salvation through faith in His name, our Lord must needs die an atoning death on the cross. So we read His own words, "I AM the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." (John 10:11). Did ever love go so far? Did ever love pay such a price? How feebly we realize it. Through Him we get salvation, liberty (in contrast with Judaism), sustenance, life

(where it was forfeited under the law), intimacy (where the law spoke of distance), communion as the Father has communion with the Son, eternal life, never to be plucked from the hand of the Father, nor from the hand of the Son, the double grip of eternal love. What assurance! Surely such love demands our all.

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