

CHRIST AND MAN.

A Sermon Preached in Zion Church, Montreal, by Rev. A. J. Bray.

HEBREWS xii., 1, 2.—Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.

God is the fulness of all substance, of all force, and of all law. He is the infinite substance, the absolute force, the eternal law. He is yet more. He is the centre of all substances—their creator and preserver; the centre of all forces—their beginning and end; the centre of all laws—their principle, their sanction and their majesty. And He has revealed Himself to us by substance—as body; by force—as spirit coming into contact with spirit; by law—as king, swaying His sceptre to the uttermost fringes of creation. We see Him without seeing Him, just as we see each other without seeing each other; for though I can see now but rows of mere bodies before me, I know that I am looking upon men and women of life and intelligence, with a spirit looking through eyes and throbbing through limbs. Even so do I see the Father and Mother of all spirits. We are sure of His presence, for His light is on all things; we are sure of His affection—it burns deep in our heart. The sun sometimes gathers clouds to lessen his splendour, but we know the sun is there, blazing out in the blue vaults of heaven. So God, in pity for the weakness of our vision, has wrapped Himself in clouds; but we know that He is there—the fountain of light and of love. He spake unto the fathers by the prophets: declared Himself unto them by direct communication, and to the people by them. In these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, Jesus Christ. We have felt that all things tell us of God; bird and tree and stream; mountain range and deep, green valley; silent lake and restless river, and swelling waves of ocean. But the perfect form of speech has dropped from the lips and life and dying of Christ; in Him we have the brightness of God's glory—the express image of His person.

The first motive—the first impulse to a true life upon the earth must spring from a knowledge of God. Not a knowledge of theologies—or the merely theological God, but a knowledge that comes from personal acquaintance and contact and communion—a knowledge that is wisdom, the direct result of a living and powerful faith. That we can only get from the lips and the life, and the dying of Christ. Christ is the nexus—the connecting link between man and the Father God—He is the revelation and the road. The material universe—the universe of intelligence, the universe of righteousness, are manifestations of God, and have Christ for their centre. But Christ has brought God nigh to man, has restored the child to his Father. The divine side of Christ's work is mystery to us. There seems in it an awful something. When we have declared the divine Fatherhood, how that in love He created all, in love blesses all, and in love will save all—we are filled with great peace, and a joy that must sing. But we feel that all is not said. Who can say it? Not I—and not you. Let us bow before the incomprehensible, sure that it means love to mankind. But Christ's work among us and for us, we may contemplate, and talk of.

I want to speak of Christ to-day—Christ and man—not Christ and God. Not of His relation to the Father, but of His relation to the human race. The writer of the epistle says, "Run with patience, with resolute endurance do mightily and suffer mightily—run ever toward the goal of life, that is to say, toward God," but, never cease looking at Jesus Christ. And what does he mean by that? Does he mean that you are to look to Christ as you toil or fight along the ways of life, just as a wanderer returning home turns his eyes toward the land of his love—or as the benighted one keeps his eye on the light in the window—or as the ambitious will look to some illustrious exemplar of fortitude and the heroism that commands success? Yes—that in some part. He is indeed the great leader of life. He takes it at the beginning—guides its first step and its last; leads the march of man to God. And man must have a leader. I have often said that when faith is born in you, you have a new life—new forces—new powers of vision—new emotions—you see God—you see and feel God. But from the goal of life you are a great way. There is a long and difficult course before you. There are hindrances which your own nature will create, hindrances which others will create for you, by reason of their ignorance or their malice. The world, the flesh and the devil are in the way of life as the marshaled armies, barring the way to God. You see God, you feel His power, you live, but the goal of life—the perfect manhood lies far beyond. The first step you take toward it is in pain and weakness, and the conviction is borne in upon you that you must have a leader—some one to inspire by a great example and a word of cheer. I stand up in my helplessness, I long to run this race and gain the eternal prize, but who will lead me. I appeal to that "cloud of witnesses"—"you are crowned heroes—you have won the prize, for you have reached the goal; is there not one among you who can come to the help of me who am too ignorant of the way and the war—weak from inward sin and outward circumstance? Not one?" No, not one. They look on me—and I must look on Him, Jesus Christ. He is the leader in the race of life.

But stay—not blindly and with unreason am I going to follow. What are the qualifications of this leader? You are going to propose yourself as my guide in an exploring expedition? You are going to take me up Mont Blanc? Do you know the way? Have you been there? Are you aware of the perils? My guide on a difficult and dangerous journey must have knowledge? You propose to train me in the arts or science or literature of a country. My first question is—do you know the things you would teach? It is proposed to place a man at the head of an army—he has to conduct it through a difficult campaign of much marching and much fighting. Does he know the country; does he know the art of war? Ignorance of these things means disaster, ruin. Yes—that is doubtless the first qualification for leadership, knowledge. There may be a lofty purpose—a daring courage—a sublime energy—but all will fail if knowledge be wanting. Had Christ that qualification, knowledge? Not knowledge of God—we know He had—for He came from God, and knew His Father's will. He spoke the divine thought in perfect language, which all who had ears to hear might hear; but had He knowledge of man, man's weakness and sin? Did He know the way of life and all the hindrances that stood piled up there? I turn to history for an answer. For the Gospels are history—not a creed—a set of doctrines—a philosophy of religion—or a science of life—but

a simple, though luminous chapter of history. It tells of Christ's word and work among men.

It is customary for us to gauge a man's knowledge of men by his conduct toward them. He professes to be a friend of the fallen and the wretched, coming forward with philanthropic schemes for their rescue; but if you find him tender when he should be stern, and harsh when he should be gracious, you say "That man will not succeed, he has not sufficient knowledge of the people he would help." Now, apply that test to Jesus Christ. He declared from the first that he had come to lead humanity back to its home and its God. He announced Himself as the Leader, and His cry was "Follow Me." And I want you to call to mind how well He knew the men He had come to guide, and how vividly He displayed the qualities needed in a great leader.

If I am to have a leader in whom I can place confidence, I must be sure that he is one with me, that he can pity my weakness, my want and my woe. He must have a fellow feeling, or I shall be afraid. He must have a heart that will beat responsive to my heart. He must be greater, wiser, stronger than I am; yet possessed of a tender love. I do not ask for a critic, or a stern censor; I ask for a guide. Jesus Christ had that tenderness, and has it now; for He is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. He was tender towards all who knew their want and sin; it was He who said, "Whatsoever you shall do to the least of these My brethren, you will have done it unto Me," an expression which introduced Christian fraternity into the world, and which still enkindles in a thousand hearts the fire of a holy brotherhood. He was tender toward sinners; He sat at meat with them, and when doctrinal pride rebuked Him, He said, "I am not come for those who are in health, but for those who are sick." Catching sight of a publican who, prompted by a burning desire to see Him, had climbed up into a tree, He says, "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for this day I must abide in thy house." A sinful woman approaches Him, and ventures even to anoint His feet with ointment, to the great scandal of a large assembly; He reassures her by that immortal word, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, because she has loved much." They bring before Him a woman taken in adultery, in order to force from Him a judgment which by its very leniency should compromise Him; but He knew her penitence and their hypocrisy, and said, "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her." He wept over His ungrateful and parricidal country. He washed His disciples' feet to show that the meanest duty was worthy of the loftiest soul. Even when dying on the cross in pain of body, anguish of mind, and amid the jeers of bystanding bigots, He cried on their behalf, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do"; He knew their ignorance and pitied it—He knew their sin and pardoned it.

But an unvarying tenderness would be a great failing in a leader, for man has manifold moods. There are times when to spare the rod is to spoil the child. Some evils must only be met by sternness; they must be overthrown by destructive criticism or fierce anathema; they must be burnt out as by fire. Tenderness toward the self-righteous Pharisee would but bolster up his pride. And all men get their Pharisaic moments—times when they are self-confident and nplified in self-esteem. The true guide to God will smite them down from that pinnacle, and bid them lie in the dust and confess their sin. Christ was the true guide. Self-esteem—whether in a bearded and phylactered Rabbi, or in His disciple Peter—was rebuked as an unclean and unholy thing. He made war against the foul spirit, and scorched it with the fierce anger of his pure soul. He sought to lead men up the rough passes and on to the heights of holiness. Sometimes he spoke them words of cheer and comfort, and sometimes he goaded them along; but always and ever it was done in love. By His sympathy, His undying love, He has become man's faithful and true High Priest. One with us in all things, knowing our infirmity and our sin, His love makes sacrifice and pleads—an offering and a prayer acceptable to God on man's behalf.

And that is the leader you and I want friends—one who knows the way and knows us and is full of love. Who else has got that twofold knowledge? Not one of those angels who are sent to minister to us. They know not the weakness of the flesh and the weariness of the way. And not one of that "cloud of witnesses." Each had his own nature—weaknesses, failings and sins—but His nature differed from mine—and His way to God was unlike mine. I must have one who knows, (not simply humanity, but) me and my way to life eternal. Jesus Christ is that one. There is not a doubt that troubles in my mind—not a weakness of the flesh or of the spirit that he does not know and sympathize with. And there is not a hindrance in the way—not a temptation of the world or of the devil that He has not met and conquered.

Aye, met and conquered. Two more essential qualifications suggested in a sentence. Jesus Christ turned aside from no temptation and no trial. Obeying the impulse of the spirit He went into the wilderness, and there wrestled with the devil of sin. Through the fleshly avenues the fierce temptation came; rising higher, it assailed him through ambition—failing there—the attack was directed at the very citadel of His holiness—His trust in God the Father. The shame of popular contempt was His; the danger of popular favour beset Him also, but He conquered; sublimely triumphed over all, and is set down at the right hand of the majesty on high. The light of victory is on His brow—the conquering sword is in His hand, and He marches over a conquered field—the Captain of our salvation.

Now I come to a great question. The starting point was life—the soul's motion toward God—toward a revealed God. The first movement of that life tells of the need for a leader. Christ offers Himself. He says He has perfect knowledge of me and of the way. He has surmounted every obstacle, and a thousand more than I can meet. He has gloriously conquered. He has sounded the deeps of suffering and lives; He has trodden the winepress alone and triumphed. He says: "Follow me, and I will give unto you eternal life, and no man shall pluck you out of My hand." While the words are yet sounding in my ears, I look upon this Man and say, "Great Captain, true and mighty leader, WHO art thou? tell me thy nature and thy name." I have seen the outer life of Christ, and I long now to contemplate the inner. This Epistle satisfies my want. It tells me that Jesus Christ, this leader in the race of life, is the beginning of all things; He is the Alpha of the universe. At His word chaos melted into order, and light mantled all with beauty. The mountains,