

CANADIAN PULPIT.

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Christ's Presence with His People.

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TEXT:—"I will not leave you orphans, J. o. xiv. 18," "I am with you always," Matt. xxviii. 20.

A day came when Jesus was parted from them and carried away.



REV. J. THOMPSON.

The disciples watched him as he went up and passed from sight behind the cloud, and many have thought of Him ever since as one who has left the world behind Him and is now far away. He is yonder amid infinite blessedness, and I am here amid daily care and sorrow, and how to bring His help to my present needs is the problem at which faith often stumbles. But did He not say, "I will not leave you orphans? Lo I am with you through all the days?" And are we afraid He will not keep this promise? Are we thinking of Him as we do of other men who have lived, finished their work and gone away? Is Jesus only one of those historical persons who has long since disappeared from the scene and all that is left of him now, only a fond, fading memory to cherish, or an example to follow? If this be so, then our life must be shorn off its sweetest joys, for His assured presence is the Holy of Holies, of a believer's confidence, and his throne of grace is where faith seeks to meet Him as the ever living and ever present Saviour, who retains all the tenderness of a heart that constrained Him when here among His people, to shed tears when He saw their sins and sorrows. He is the same dear, tender, loving friend to us all this day, amid the trials and bereavements that afflict men now, that he was to Mary and Martha and many another troubled heart. His going away has not changed His nature, and His heart is as full of pity and tenderness this day as it was when He took the little children in His arms and fondled them on His knee. As human and brotherly in His sympathies now as He was when John leaned on His bosom. His presence and friendship mean as much to His people to day as they ever did to Peter and James and John. His heart has lost none of its fondness for His own whom He loves. He is still the Good Shepherd going before His sheep and calling them all by name, and His compassion is as deep as it was on the day He was parted from His disciples.

1. *His presence is the joy and inspiration of our life.* How blessed to realize His presence with us. Many, like the woman who had been so long afflicted, have spent all they had, and were nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, till they learned to come and tell Jesus. They found how near He had been to them all the time; how easy it was to speak to Him; and how ample that Divine help is, and how quickly He made them whole, when at last they sought His aid. It is when the power and burden of sin are felt that the presence of the Saviour is so precious, and His promises of rest and peace are so encouraging. And when, amid our troubles we make Him our confident, no one need doubt but that He is both familiar with them, and knows all about the things that try us most. And that He will also bring his own life into perfect sympathy with ours, and prove Himself to be a present help in our time of need.

How like his brethren He was, and is now; and as the man of sorrows He has passed through their experiences. He Himself has stood where many of His afflicted people stand to-day, and has felt what they are now feeling, and His eyes look down into the hidden depths of their sorrows. His very training brought Him into sympathetic relations with the people, and from personal experience He could appreciate the needs, the tastes, the tendencies, and trials of the multitude. He is such that we may well throw ourselves on His brotherhood, and tell Him of what lies heaviest on our hearts. And when we steal away from this world of noise and confusion, into the quiet of that Holy of Holies with Christ alone to confess, to plead, and to obtain from Him grace and mercy, we know that we are known of Him just as we are. We do not come to tell Him anything He does not know, but just to receive what His love sees best to give.

2. *He is with us to help and bless.* How soon the comfort comes when He comes, and how easily a cold heart is warmed when He touches it with His holy fire—a live coal from off the altar. How easily its rebellion is subdued when He lays His strong hand upon it. How quickly a shut heart is opened and made the home of the Saviour's presence when the Holy Spirit breathes upon it. And what an abundant harvest grows when he sows the seeds of everlasting life in souls made glad through His grace. How easily the winter of our indifference is turned into living freshness, and all the growth and blooming beauty of summer when He pours out the showers of His blessing, and breathes the fragrance of His love around us! What is a hard heart when the power of the Spirit is given to melt and to mould it! What are all our spiritual foes in the hands of Him who came to destroy the works of the devil! And what are all a sinner's wants when brought into relation to the unsearchable riches of Christ. *It is the Saviour who is with us.* And when He comes to bind Satan and cast him out, it is no new or strange work for Him, and He has nothing

to do in your case that He has not often done before, and is doing all the time for those in whose hearts Christ is formed the hope of glory. He who washed that great multitude who have passed into life eternal can also wash you and make you whiter than snow, and teach you the new song, for that blood has lost none of its efficacy. We need not trouble ourselves as to *how* all this is to be done; we simply rest on the promise that he *will* do it. When the warm wind of spring comes the fields and forests cannot help blooming; when the sun pours his balmy light and heat upon the flowers they must open to be painted and filled with His glory. We don't expect them to bloom in winter, but in early summer so little do we expect the deadness of January. So is it with our souls when times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord, and his warm, loving presence melts away the winter of sin from the heart.

3. *His presence is the presence of God.* He is Immanuel, God with us. He is not only the way to the Father, but He and the Father are one. So fellowship with Him is fellowship with the God of all comfort, and we breathe the warm atmosphere and live under the daily care of the Father of mercies. We often pray "O God of Israel; O God of Zion." The God of long past days! We think of Him as belonging to patriarchs and prophets, but not to ourselves, whose goings forth were glorious in Old Testament times, but whose footsteps we never see now. We may learn much from Jacob's prayer. When the old patriarch bowed his head before the Almighty, he did not begin his prayer, "O Thou God of nature: and Thou God of providence." That would have been like twin cliffs whose summits were lost in the mists, or far up in the cold frosty air; while the burdened heart lay in darkness and weariness far below. But when Jacob prayed he said "O God of my father Abraham: God of my father Isaac." And this brought God near to him, not as an abstraction, but as the God who had fed and kept him all his life long.

And why may not we who have come to God through Christ, and who is now our Father in Christ, pray, "O God of Canada: the God of my own country and of my own people: the God of my father and of my mother: the God of my own home and of my own needs?" Not a God afar off, but in the midst of all our cares, and fears and sins, so that I may lay my hand in His. There is surely such a way of making Him known in the Lord Jesus Christ as shall be to us as an inspiration and gracious assurance. And that men under burdens, men in sorrow, whose hopes have all been blighted, lonely men who are without sympathy in life; men troubled and weary and bankrupt of courage might look up to Him who is over all, and rejoice in His presence as men do at the coming in of the morning—calm, sweet, radiant, and hopeful.

4. *His presence is the presence of the Holy Spirit,* that other Comforter. When Jesus was preparing to leave he said to His disciples, "I will send Him to you." And not till our eyes are opened shall we see that all the hills around are occupied with the chariots of the Lord. But how the truth grows, and how rich the promises of grace become, and how near and precious Christ seems when His Spirit fills our heart. It is the Holy Spirit that makes the presence of our Saviour so real to us. When He comes to wake up within us a sympathetic interest in Him, we make rapid advancements in those lessons which He applies with grace to the heart. When He breathes the fragrance of heaven over the soul we gather up the golden shekels from the treasury of the Lord, and lay up vast stores of heart-wealth. The experimental side of religion is the most satisfying, and when the Spirit is dealing directly with the heart, the Gospel becomes a feast of fat things, and Jesus Christ Himself the chief among ten thousand.

In the soft light of early summer, when the world has grown rich and full, we see all nature quickened. Some mysterious and pervasive influence has breathed upon her, the icy fetters are broken, and the fountains of the symbol books are opened; the forests are clothed in their leafy mantle; the flowers are strewn all the hill sides over and all the valleys through, for the time of the singing of birds has come.

So is it when Jesus shows himself to his people; their hearts are then made glad with a great joy; summer and sunshine fill the soul with all their attendant pomp and glories. When the Holy Spirit is poured out the story of the cross has such divine power to inspire, to enable, to purify and save men. It brings heaven so near to the earth, and Jesus so near to the heart, and overhangs the present life with the sure mercies of David. When Jesus opens my eyes, cleanses my spiritual leprosy, speaks to my conscience, His comforting assurances fit into every corner of my moral life as the key fits the lock;—bread for the hungry, water for the thirsty, a balm for the wounded, comfort for the sad, light to dispel our darkness, a guide to lead us through all life's perplexities! Why, grace touches man's needs as the sunlight that bends down to bathe the world, and to touch everything that lives: it is as the morning radiance that comes to kiss every leaf, and blossom, and bud, and flower. With no less efficiency than this does our Saviour lay His love at the roots of our moral life, and our manifold wants are encircled by the multitude of His tender mercies as the great, wide dome of heaven that overhangs us wherever we may look up. What wonderful adaptation the Spirit gives to the unsearchable riches of Christ as He applies them to the needs of the soul. Not more fitted is the light to the eye, the air to the lungs, not more adapted are the sunshine and the shower to the parched ground, than are the truths of divine grace, and the tender mercies of our God to the heart that longs for his salvation. As cold water to a thirsty soul, so is the assured presence of Christ to the weary, timid, doubting heart that learns to come to Him for rest.

5. *He is with us as our King to rule our hearts in love.* There are some who are anxious to crown Christ a King in Jerusalem,