

The Christian.

ST JOHN, N. B., APRIL, 1889.

CHRIST STANDING AND KNOCKING.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me.—Rev. iii. 20.

There is no mistake more easy and common with men, and certainly none more fatal, than to undervalue the sayings of Jesus. To hear and do His sayings is to build an eternal mansion on the Rock of Ages—to hear and do them not is to build our house, embracing all our time and labor and skill with all we have or hope for in time and for eternity, on sinking sand. His words are the food which shall feed and satisfy the human spirit forever, for they are spirit and they are life. (John vi. 63). His words shall awake all the dead and bring the good doers and the evil doers to the two resurrections; and the words which He has spoken shall judge the hearers in the last day.

What a boon God has given us in His Book which contains a complete record of Jesus and what He has done and spoken. In it we have the words He spake to the multitudes and to His disciples before His death, the words He used in prayer to His Father and what He uttered when dying. We have His words to His apostles after His resurrection, and His last message and charge to them when about to ascend to heaven. In this Book and in this verse we have the sayings He uttered over sixty years after He went to heaven, when He descended to the Isle of Patmos to give to His servant John His last revelation and to finish the faith which He once delivered to the saints.

These words are very precious to every reader who duly considers that they were spoken by the Conqueror of death after He had been so long upon His Father's throne worshipped by the highest inhabitants of heaven, and when He finds in them no lack of that pathos and yearning solicitude for the lost, manifest in His lament over Jerusalem when on His way to Gethsemane and the cross. His love for the lost still continues.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock, etc. This settles the question

WHETHER GOD OR THE SINNER MOVES FIRST.

In his conversion God and not the sinner moves first. He gave His beloved Son when no one asked for a Saviour or sought after God. And even in the work of conversion Jesus seeks the sinner before the sinner seeks Him. He stands at the door and knocks. The apostles said little about the sinner seeking Jesus. Their great theme was Jesus seeking the sinner. Would to God that Jesus seeking the sinner was the burden of the preaching of to-day. He moves first. But the sinner must also move in the matter. Two things are positively essential to His salvation. He must hear the voice of Jesus and open the door. Man is not a piece of inert matter or a mere machine. God has made him to be His companion and placed him over His works, and though a fallen companion, the blessed Jesus here acknowledges His manhood and nobility. Man's heart is a palace worth dying for, and Jesus eagerly seeks to enter it. Although bolted and barred against Him he stands at the door and knocks. The Maker permits man to hold the key and will not force an entrance. It is the dignity of man which makes him such an object of interest to the intelligences of the universe and to the "Lord of all."

The solicitude of Jesus is not confined to any nation or class of men. He seeks the race. "If any man hear My voice," etc. This is in beautiful harmony with all gospel teaching. He says of His Father's affection, "God so loved the world," etc. When by the grace of God He tasted death it was for every man. His last message is, Go ye unto all

the world and preach the gospel unto every creature and now, "if any man hear My voice and open the door I will come in to him, etc.

What Jesus has done and is doing for us are unconditional. He died for our sins and is pleading with sinners without anything on our part only that we are sinners. But what He promises to do for sinners is conditional. It has an important if in it. Jesus has died for our sins and risen for our justification and now offers salvation. All this has been done without any action on our part, but we must hear Him and open the door before He will save us.

HOW DOES JESUS KNOCK?

By speaking to sinners, reasoning and pleading with them. He has something important to tell them. He has great offers to make them, great love to reveal. They can accept these offers and they can also reject them. They have power to accept of that wonderful love He is waiting to lavish upon them, and they have the power to despise and refuse it. What He has to tell sinners is that He died for their sins, according to the scriptures, was buried and He rose again the third day according to the scriptures. What He offers is to forgive all their sins, to make them children of God and give them His Holy Spirit to shed the love of God abroad in their heart and to enable them to gain eternal life. The gospel is what Jesus has to tell sinners and all the fullness of God is what He has to offer. Just before He went to heaven He declared the gospel (sometimes called the faith) to the apostles, charged them to preach it to every creature, and solemnly promised to be with them till the end of the world, and to complete His endorsement of them and prevent their making any mistake they were to tarry at Jerusalem till they would be filled with the Holy Spirit who would lead them into all truth. This all took place, and every one who heard these ambassadors of Jesus heard Jesus and also His Father. And those that rejected them rejected Jesus and His Father. Their preaching began at Jerusalem on the very day on which the Holy Spirit came from heaven and filled the apostles, but it is to spread among all nations and to last till the end of time. The men that first preached this gospel are dead, but the gospel is not dead and the Holy Spirit is not dead, and Jesus is alive and lives forevermore. He now knocks at the door by that gospel and by His Holy Spirit, though in person He is now in heaven. By this we learn that the Holy Spirit by the gospel persuades sinners to be reconciled to God, and that no one is saved but by His persuasion. The Christian is influenced by the Holy Spirit and the sinner is also influenced by the same Spirit, and here we may notice the difference in this respect between the Christian and the sinner.

THE HOLY SPIRIT DWELLS IN THE CHRISTIAN BUT NOT IN THE SINNER.

The Christian is a believer the sinner an unbeliever. The one walks by faith the other walks by sight or sense. The Spirit is received by faith, he is not received by sight or sense. He that believes Jesus can receive the Spirit, he that does not believe Jesus cannot. Hear the Great Teacher on the Comforter, "Even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not neither knoweth Him, but ye know Him for He dwelleth with you and shall be in you. (John xiv. 17). Here Jesus declares positively that the world cannot receive the Spirit, and gives the reason because it seeth Him not neither knoweth Him. But the apostles knew Him because He dwelt with them and in them. The Holy Spirit is with and in them who believe in Jesus and walk by faith. God gives His Holy Spirit to them that obey Him. But, says one, the sinner can't believe in Jesus until the Spirit enters and prepares his heart to receive the gospel. Nothing can be more directly opposed to Jesus' teaching than this.

He tells us that the world cannot receive the Spirit and gives the reason, but because the world can receive the gospel He sends it to every man in the world, and while He promises to save the obedient believer He positively declares that he that believeth not shall be damned. There is no hope, no remedy for the unbeliever. If I were to attempt to oppose the Son of God and His teaching, I know no other way in which I could do it more readily than to tell men that they could not believe Him until they received His Holy Spirit to prepare them to believe His gospel. No, no, the Holy Spirit will not enter nor dwell with the man that does not believe Jesus, but the wrath of God abides on him. (John iii. 36).

But the believer in Jesus receives the Holy Spirit by faith. He lives and walks by faith, holding sweet communion with God, and the Holy Spirit bearing witness along with his own Spirit that he is a child of God, filling him with joy and peace—a sweet foretaste of the joys of heaven. When the Holy Spirit, by the gospel, reasons and pleads with the sinner there is a door between them, and in proportion to the influence He has upon the heart of the inmate will he be inclined to open the door. If the voice of Jesus outside is heard by the inmate and he is unwilling to admit the Redeemer the more determined he becomes to keep the door barred. But if He is disposed to harken to Him who stands knocking and pleading and who is so intensely anxious to save him that He waits to be gracious and will still remain at the door telling the dying inmate how much His Father loved him and how freely He gave the Son of His love to bleed and die for his sins, telling him the blessed consequence of him opening the door—the inmate is moved. He relents. His feelings to God and Christ become changed. He would like to have Christ as his guest were he only worthy. But his heart is so hard and impure he thinks it altogether unfit for a divine residence, and he wishes and prays to be better so that he might open the door. Jesus meets all these objections by His voice. "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." If any man hear My voice and open I will come in to him. If a moral man, a good praying man like Cornelius (Acts x.) hear and open, that praying man needs Me. If a bloodthirsty man like Saul (Acts ix.) hear My voice and open I will come in and sup with him. If a drunkard hear and open I will come in to him. If a murderer hear and open I will come in to him. None is so good as to get to heaven without Me and none too bad to be cleansed and pardoned through the blood of My cross. I know all men, died for all, and can meet the case of every man who will open and let me in. I can cleanse and I alone.

HOW A MAN KNOWS HE IS OPENING THE DOOR FOR CHRIST.

Many a one is puzzled here how he may know that he is opening his heart to the Son of God. The Acts of Apostles is the book God has given to show how men were saved after Jesus' death and resurrection, and how they opened their hearts and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The first sermon was addressed to many bolted hearts. Jesus by His Gospel and Holy Spirit was pleading outside through His apostle. He showed the people their sins which were of the deepest dye and the glorious work of Jesus whom they had crucified, whom God had raised and made both Lord and Christ in the heaven. Their hearts relented, they were pierced, they were opened. How was this known to themselves, to the apostles, "by this sign—"They said, men and brethren, What shall we do?" They were anxious to do the will of the Saviour, to give themselves wholly to Christ. This is the best proof that any man can give of an open heart. They were told what to do in the name of Jesus Christ, they gladly did it and they received the gift