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DIVINITY.

THE BREAD OF LIFE.

By Wm. Jay.

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.—John vi. 25.

Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.' Such is the exclamation of Paul. And he does not despise what he could not possess, or undervalue what he did not understand. He was a man of genius and of learning. He had examined the claims of human science, and know how little it could do for man in his most important interests. He was also no stranger to the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour. The Son of God had been revealed in him; and from that blessed hour his acquaintance with him had been constantly increasing. He knew whom he had believed; and such was the efficacy of this knowledge, in purifying his passions, in tranquilizing his conscience, in refreshing and delighting his heart, that he was led comparatively to depreciate every thing else; and determined 'to know nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified.'

And is not this the determination of every christian? And is it not justifiable? is it not wise? Need we wonder that his Saviour is every thing with him, since he is every thing to him?—his sun and shield—his guide and guard—his physician and friend—his righteousness and strength—his clothing and his food. 'And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.'

Observe, I. A representation of the Saviour. II. The way in which we are to derive advantage from him. III. The happiness his followers shall enjoy.

I. A representation of the Saviour. 'I am the bread of life.' All life is valuable, and there are several degrees of it rising above each other. There is vegetable life: this is superior to dead matter, as a tree is more excellent than a stone. There is animal life: this is superior to vegetable, as a bird is more excellent than a tree. There is rational life: this is superior to animal, as a man is more excellent than a beast. His form and his powers proclaim his pre-eminence, and prove him lord of this lower world. But there is a life superior to human, and which 'the natural man understandeth not, because it is spiritually discerned.' It is called 'the life of God.' Of this, man was originally possessed; from this he has fallen by sin; to this he is restored by divine grace.

And there are some who are proofs of the possibility of this restoration. They have 'passed from death unto life.' Though alive to other things, they were once dead to the things of God. They had no spiritual sensibility; but they now feel. They had no spiritual appetite; but they now 'hunger and thirst after righteousness.' They had no spiritual senses, 'to discern both good and evil;' but they now hear his voice, see his glory, and 'taste that the Lord is gracious.' They had no spiritual energy or action; but they now 'strive to enter in at the strait gate, walk in the way overcasting,' and 'labour, that, whether present or absent, they may be accepted of him.' These dispositions may be perfect, and these exertions may be weak; but they could not make the one, nor be conscious of the other—unless they were alive.

The scripture loves to present religion to us under the notion of life: and it is a very important and distinguishing one. In a picture there is likeness, and how striking does the resemblance sometimes appear. But what a difference is there between the shadow and the substance; between the image and the original. It seems to speak; but it is silent. The "breathing can vass" is not life. A figure may be formed equal to the size of a man; and ingenuity may add motion to likeness; but it is not self-moved; its movements, few and senseless, result from foreign force or skill. And mechanism, how-

ever fine or finished is not life. How many things that look like religion fall short of it. How many have the form of godliness while they deny the power thereof. How many, destitute of all inward principle, are actuated in duty by external motives only; and whose duty begins and ends with the operation of the circumstances producing it! But God puts his spirit within us, and causes us to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes.

Now observe the relation in which the Lord Jesus stands to this life. 'I am (says he) the bread of life.' Bread often stands for all that nourishes and sustains our bodies; and hence we read of the 'staff of bread': the meaning is, that life leans on it for support. And our Saviour is all that is necessary to the life of God in the soul, 'I am come, (says he) that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. For the bread of God is he that cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.'

Bread corn is bruised. The grain passeth through a process which seems likely to destroy it, before it becomes our food. And what means our Saviour when he says, 'The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world?' Some tell us that he refers to his doctrine only. It is admitted that instruction may be called the food of the mind—but why does our Lord refer to his flesh? And what master ever spake of his disciples eating himself? 'My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.' What can this imply but a truth so fully revealed in the scripture—that, he becomes our saviour by being our sacrifice, and that we live by his death!

His language leads us to another reflection, which is not the less important because it is common. It is this: Bread is nothing to us, however prepared, or presented, or possessed, unless it be eaten. You may perish with bread in your house, and even in your hand—it is only by admitting it into the animal system, that it can become nourishment. 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever.—Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of God and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. He that eateth me, even he shall live by me.' Is not this saying that a Saviour unapplied will profit you nothing? He may have in himself every thing you need; he may be nigh to you; he may be proposed to you in the gospel—and all this is true; but he must be received by faith. For to vary the image, 'To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.'

This brings us to remark,

II. The way in which we derive advantage from him. It is by coming to him; by believing on him. 'He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.' And here we are not to suppose that two different characters are intended, of which the one comes to our Lord, and the other believes on him. The expressions designate the same person; and are explanatory of each other. So that if you ask, What is coming to him? You are told that it is believing on him. And if you ask, What is believing on him? You are told it is coming to him.

The case is this. Since so much depends on real faith, it is necessary for us to know what it is; but as we have more to do with the uses of things than with their nature; and as they are more obviously known by their operations and effects, than by their physical and abstract qualities, the scripture holds forth real faith by its office, and in its actings. It tells us what faith does in the man who is the possessor of it: it 'works by love,' 'overcomes the world;' it 'purifies the heart;' it brings a man to Christ. He that believeth on him, comes to him. This representation of faith is very instructive.

First. It reminds us that the Lord Jesus is accessible. In the days of his flesh he was approach-

able in his bodily presence; and many went to him and implored relief; and none ever implored in vain. In this sense we can no longer approach him; in this sense he is 'no more in the world.' But unless he is accessible under another and a higher view, how can he verify the promise; 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them?' Did he appoint his disciples to meet him in Galilee after his resurrection; and did they go down and find him there? So he has ordained means in the use of which, if we are found, he will be found. For he is present among the assemblies of his people, and in his house, and at his table, and in his word, and upon his throne; there dispensing mercy and grace to help us in every time of need.

Secondly. It teaches us, that faith is not a notion, but a principle; and is always attended with an application of the soul to the Redeemer. Under the influence of it I cannot rest without him; but from a conviction of my perilous and perishing case, and a persuasion of his power, appointment, and readiness to succour and to save me, I go to him and address him. I throw myself at his feet, and cry, 'Lord save, I perish.' I see him as the only refuge, and I seek to enter him. I view him as the Lord my righteousness and strength, and pray to be found in him. On this foundation I begin to build: from this fulness I receive, and grace for grace.

And let it be remembered, that this application which always distinguishes genuine faith from false, is not a single address, but a renewed, a continued exercise. He that believeth on him is not one that came and transacted an affair with him, and then had nothing more to do with him—no—but one that cometh. Peter has the same thought, and equally excludes those whose religion is an action, instead of a course of action, instead of a habit, instead of a life—to whom coming as unto a living stone.' He will be necessary to the last: as long as we contract fresh guilt; as long as we are called to bear new trials and discharge new duties; as long as we are in the body of this death—so long must we come to him.

Let us notice

III. The happiness his followers shall enjoy: 'He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.' This assurance admits of several explanations.

First. The follower of Jesus shall never hunger nor thirst again after the world. This distinguishes him from all unrenovated men; for they hunger and thirst after nothing else. And this was once his own case. But having tasted the provision of God's house, his language now is, 'Lord ever more give me this bread.' Having seen the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, nothing else allures or charms; 'Whom (says he) whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.' Endeavours will be made to draw off the soul from this sovereign good. The world will present its riches, honours, pleasures and prospects; and often ask 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved?' But these syren songs will be sung in vain. All believers indeed are not equally mortified to earthly things; but as far as grace prevails in the soul, they will, they must lose their influence: as far as we are 'after the Spirit' we shall 'mind the things of the Spirit.' And no real christian, who walks by faith and not by sight, can so seek after the world again as to make it his portion, or to place his happiness in it. A covetous, ambitious, sensual, pleasure-taking christian, is a character the scripture knows nothing of.

Secondly. He shall not hunger and thirst in vain. The new creature has wants and appetites, but ample provision is made to relieve and indulge them; and the believer knows where to go for those blessings; and is not liable to disappointment in seeking for them. He no longer runs to and fro, asking, 'Who will show me any good?' He has found the source of satisfaction, and derives supplies from it.