

# THE CHRISTIAN.

"FAITH COMETH BY HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD."—Paul.

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## The Christian.

### SERMON.

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1. And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. —Revelations xxii. 1, 2.

The allegory is, perhaps, the most interesting figure of speech, especially when used to convey divine truth; and to the ancients this mode of representation would be still more interesting and beautiful, owing to the simplicity of their lives and their mode of thinking. Even to a highly cultivated intellect where the faculties have been developed in harmony with nature's teaching until the mind, as it were, reaches out from material existence and grasps the abstract—even in this highly cultivated state the mind is refreshed and invigorated, when it receives a spiritual or moral truth by a comparison with something in nature with which the eye has become familiar.

If we attentively mark the writings of the prophets of the old, and that last and greatest prophet of the New Testament, we will find that God revealed His purposes to them chiefly in allegorical forms.

In the chapter before us, the Apostle John tells us of a beautiful vision with which God has favored him; and though it may have some reference to temporal blessings, certain it is that its most intrinsic value is in its spiritual meaning. Let us, therefore, dear reader, examine this beautiful figure, and compare it with the gospel of Christ, and endeavor to discover their resemblance. In all her physical features, nature presents no more appropriate and significant figure than a river, to set forth the blessings and spread of the gospel, and the effusion of the ever-blessed Spirit.

Trace the river to its source: It may issue from a little fountain, but it gains strength and proportions as it rolls along, until, overcoming every obstacle, when obstacles present themselves, or gliding peacefully along when the way is clear, it flows on to join the vast ocean and mingle with an eternity of waters. The river in the vision proceeded out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. So the blessed gospel came not from man, but from God. True, we may trace its commencement on earth to an obscure village in a despised country; yet it had its origin in heaven; there it was that infinite wisdom divided the Plan, and infinite love carried it into execution. Yes, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were, and are, all engaged in this glorious and unspeakable work of mercy. It is a grand, a glorious, an all-important truth, that our religion is of divine origin. Although there are those who are spending their precious days in trying to prove it human, and while the heart remains hard and cold, the diseased

brain may fancy it such, for after all, I believe the real cause of infidelity lies in the heart. If the infidel would honestly compare those who reject religion, and scorn the Bible, with those who firmly believe its doctrine, heartily obey God's commands therein contained, seek the privileges the religion of Christ affords, and are looking for the rewards it promises, he will surely see that the religion of the Lord Jesus is real and must be of divine origin. Let him compare it with every other system of morality, and the most noted infidels themselves admit it to be the most perfect.

Will the infidel come with us to the bedside of the dying Christian and there mark the holy calm, and catch the last faint whisper breathing of peace, and yet doubt that such religion is divine in its origin, divine in its effects and divine in its rewards? Here then we see that the river of the vision is symbolic of the gospel in that both are of divine origin.

Now let us compare them as to progress.

Little rills of gospel truth sprang up everywhere in the footprints of the blessed Saviour, as he "went about doing good." Eager thirsty souls drank deep at those refreshing fountains; a few poor fishermen found its waters so sweet and refreshing, that they left all to follow in its course and keep close by its banks. Broader and deeper the river grew until at Calvary's Mount it became unfathomable. How it swelled and overflowed its banks on that memorable Pentecost, when the flood gates of heaven's mercy were opened and from out the sanctuary of God flowed those pure life-giving waters. Then the little rills that lingered in the paths the blessed Saviour trod in His lonely pilgrimage throughout the land His presence blessed while on earth, now swelled by the Pentecostal rain, flowed onward and joined the great river of gospel truth.

In the first century the gospel had been fully preached throughout Judea and the countries round about; it had even reached Rome itself. Then many dark days followed. The tyrants of pagan Rome used all their hellish devices to dry up this great stream; but the fires they kindled to consume only purified it. No worldly advantages followed in the train of Christianity in those days. No grasping the wealth of mammon in the one hand and holding up the banner of Christ in the other. Religion did not then seek to ingratiate itself with pomp and vanity either by abject cringing or by waiving the doctrine of divine truth to satisfy human caprice. Oh, no! to be a Christian then meant to be ready to die rather than deny the truth; it meant to be despised by the world but known of God. This was the Christianity—the gospel stream that swept away the embankments of pagan Rome, and sent the waters of life flowing through every city, village and hamlet of that vast empire. This was the Christianity that would soon have made the world a paradise.

But the great enemy of souls saw this. He saw the poisoned dart with which he pierced the heart of human happiness on that dark day in Eden, drawn out from the bleeding side of Emanuel on Calvary's cross. He saw the wound

fast healing up, and mankind returning to their former, happy state, nourished and strengthened by the waters of life. Then as an able general, when the field is disputed by too powerful a foe, retires to gain a better position, so Satan withdrew from open conflict with divine truth to fortify his position with the breast-works of king-craft and priest-craft. From this position, disguised as a friend, he entered the ranks of the army of the Lord. And then began Satan's vast conquest. I was going to write victory, but no, thank God, he never gained a complete victory, although his vast empire extended far and wide. And now many dark ages followed, when millions of parching, perishing souls were wandering over the burning deserts of this world and could scarcely find a rill of the waters of life flowing. Still, in the darkest days the sacred waters were in some measure silently, secretly wending their way. Thought in the hands of the dread inquisition the instruments of torture did their fearful work, yet gospel truth lived through it all. And the holy Bible, wonderful to relate, was preserved in its original purity even by those who were striving to supplant it by human creeds and heathen rites. Yes, though the great aim of our enemy both then and now is to sully the waters of divine truth by mixture with the putrid streams of this world, God has interposed, and by a series of events which appear nothing short of miraculous, has preserved for those who seek eternal life, a true chart, a pure and holy Bible. The waters of the vision, like those of Ezekiel's vision, xlix. 1, 2, were productive of life, so the blessed gospel is productive of life, holy, spiritual, real life. When we can say with the Apostle Paul, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," then is true life begun; then we begin to experience a foretaste of heaven. A single beam of the glory of God penetrating the fleshy walls of the human heart will light up its most sacred recesses. Then out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks; instead of murmuring against His will, His praise will be on our lips. While the sun of righteousness is shining in our hearts, no matter how dark and gloomy the day may appear to others, our path will be bright and will grow "brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

"And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

Now is not human nature without gospel influence diseased from head to foot? Is not sin a raging disease, and is not the whole bearing of the gospel upon human nature of a healing character? The blessed Saviour, when on earth, was called the Great Physician, and when He returned to His Father and ours, He left His gospel as a balm for every affliction. Oh! how much we need its soothing, healing influence, in this world of sickness, sin and death. Trials of life will come—care, sickness, pain. Life is often a weary pilgrimage, burdened with many woes, and the grave is before us. Man needs a balm; he needs some upholding hand, some refreshing draught. The gospel comes with its rich consolation. Health may fail, wealth may vanish, friends may die or grow cold, but the