

GOD'S LOVE.

I JOHN iv. 9-18.

If we look at man, we shall find his whole history in the history of Adam. God tried man, but man only marred all that he was trusted with.

When God chose a nation it was no better. The people were idolaters, the kings rebellious, the priests soiled their garments, so that they could not stand before God. Whatever God has given in creation, providence, law, or grace, man has abandoned. When the Lord from heaven came the iniquitous nation rejected Him. But He never fails, and God will prove His love and wisdom by meeting His own people in every single thing in which man has broken down. All will come out in glory as the positive fruit of the cross. We learn a great deal more of what God is by knowing man; and we learn a great deal more of what man is by knowing God.

If we look at the Church, man is just the same. The mystery of iniquity working, the spirit of demons among them, the love of many waxing cold, until there is not one righteous one left, but all closes in perfect ruin.

God gives a power apart from man. He gives a new life—a life in His Son. In virtue of Him, it cannot fail. It is eternal life—life in Christ.

God was perfectly manifested in the Son, when He came down from heaven to give life. But this

is not enough. What about my sins? Where are my sins? To have life without the question of sin being settled will not do. Christ had them on the cross. Christ came down from heaven to put my sin away, and He did put it away. Christ's life is in me—eternal life, and this life is in the Son. I have His life, *not His Godhead*, of course. As surely as I have partaken of the life and nature of the first Adam, so have I life in the second Adam. If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation. The divine nature is there. It is in a poor earthen vessel, it is true, but the nature is divine, and I should be showing it out.

The more I know of God, the more shall I exhibit what He is. The more I look at Him, the more I shall be like Him. What made Moses' face to shine? Was it looking at himself? No. It was being with Jehovah and looking at His glory. Moses did not know that His face was shining until he was asked to veil it. He was not occupied with Himself; the object before him was God. He had been looking at God, he was absorbed in God, and so shows out God's glory. It will be the same with us. If Christ is the object before me, I shall not be thinking of myself, but of Him. If my eye is on Him, I shall resemble Him (feebly indeed) in holiness, and humbleness, and love. I find it in Him in all its blessedness and beauty. I see it in its perfectness, and in looking at Him, I am changed into His image. In Him there is all the new nature can crave or desire. In Him I can rest, and delight and rejoice.

What never-ending joy to know that the Son of God is come! Satan works, it is true, but "*ye are of God.*" (This settles the whole thing.) No longer of the old creation, living and acting according to the life of the first Adam; but in the power of the new nature, that we derive from God. This is a most blessed truth, "*Ye are of God,*" of Him whose nature is divine. And this divine nature cannot be met but by Himself. Christ has washed us from our sins in His own most precious blood. He has baptized us from above with the Holy Ghost, and sealed us with the Spirit of promise. "*He who has wrought us for the selfsame thing, is God.*" He has given us a power that is greater than Satan's power. "*Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.*" "*Ye are of God.*" I am brought to God. I am born of God. I rest in God. I learn to know God, because I have got the nature that can know Him, just as I could only know what man is by having his nature.

I do not know all about God, that is true; but I have no uncertainty. Suppose I have a friend, I may not know all about him; but he is my friend, and I rejoice in him as such. I have no questionings as to his affections because I do not know all about him. Well, *God is my friend*, and I have a blessed rest in knowing Him as my friend. If God is my friend, what more can I need? What can be more blessed? To know God, I must have His nature. I cannot learn the nature of what I am not a partaker of. I do not know angels. I am not a partaker of the nature of angels.

We see two things in this chapter which gives the soul immense delight. Verse 9 shows us *the way God makes His love known*. In verse 17 we see *how His love is made perfect*. In verse 9 God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might have *life* through Him. That we might have life who were dead, that we might be partakers of a life that flows from the manifestation of God's love—a life separated altogether from nature and nature's affections and pleasures. It cannot be hinged in with selfishness. And what is my nature: is it not mere selfishness? If I look at my motives from day to day, what shall I find them? Are they not self? We have no idea how we are under the influence of self. Is it not true that the trifles of dress more occupy the thoughts of many than all God has done in sending down His Son from heaven to save sinners? It is a positive fact, and it is no use to try to hide it from ourselves. We cannot hide it from God.

On the other hand, the more I look at God's love, the more I see its perfectness. It is said, "for a good man some would even dare to die." But when there was not one single good thing in us, God commended His love towards us. It was purely grace shown to us in the cross. We were just sinners and nothing but sinners when Christ died to save us. And I can never understand what God's love really is, until I can say I am merely a sinner. If you do not know what God's love is, it is because you have not learnt that

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great truth, "You are but a sinner." What is it that God has given to save sinners? The very nearest thing to His heart, the most precious boon He had to bestow. *His own beloved and only-begotten Son.* There is no accounting for His love; there is no estimating it. The thing most of all dear to Him was the Son of His bosom, and Him He gave. There is no limit to His love. He has given me Christ. And what have I not got in Him? "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." How can I know that God loves me? By looking at the perfect expression of His love, and this gives me rest; why? Because I see how wondrous is this love that sent down His own Son to give me eternal life, and be a propitiation for my sins. If I have no rest, what I want is a deeper sense of sin. I must learn what sin is at the cross; and then I shall see the love that has met it and suffered for it, and then my soul gets rest.

Christ's love was not the theory of one who comes and merely tells what God is, but is the practical exhibition of Him. He shows out God in all the variety of His unreserved and immeasurable love. I have learnt at the cross what God was to me a sinner, and now I have to learn how He meets my need as a saint, *by feeling my need and bringing it to Him.* To be hungry is not enough, I must be really starving to know what is in His heart towards me. When the prodigal was hungry he went to feed upon husks; but when he was

starving, he turned to his father's house, and thus learnt the love of the father's heart.

In verse 15, how low God comes, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God." The babe who but just confesses Christ, has eternal life as truly as the strong man in Christ. It is not a question of what I am, but of what Christ is.

Verse 16—"He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him." If I am dwelling in God, I am dwelling in love, and should be showing out love by looking at Him.

Verse 17. This is a wonderful thing to say, "As He is, so are we in this world." We are now before God, *as Christ is!* He is my life, and I cannot be really, nor ought to appear in anything separated from Him. "Herein is love with us made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment." Does the heart get exercised about judgment? Why, the Judge *is my righteousness?* Has He not perfectly put away my sin, having been judged in my stead? "There is no fear in love." If there is the smallest doubt or distrust in the heart towards God, you are not made perfect in love; for "perfect love casteth out fear." There are things to fear, it is true; *we may well fear sin, and the influence of our own selfish interests.* But the practical effect of resting on God is to cast out fear, and make the heart perfect in love. His love is perfect. We have to own it, bow to it, accept it as ours in Christ, and bless Him for it.

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THE GUIDING PILLAR.

The exodus was only the beginning
 Of countless tender mercies by the way;
 God went before His people He had chosen,
 With fire by night and with a cloud by day.

He took it not away, that cloudy pillar,
 Altho' they oft provoked Him so to do,
 Ungrateful tho' they were for all His kindness,
 The pillar led them *all* their journey through.

It must have looked so *cool* and so *refreshing*—
 That *cloudy* pillar in the *heat of day*,
 And then at night, its shadows no more needed,
 Became a fire to light them on the way.

Just what they needed, wonderfully fitted
 To meet the varying wants of every hour;
 But oh, how little did they prize the token
 Of His unerring wisdom, love, and power!

God's dealings often crossed their inclinations—
 The pillar went too fast or went too slow;
 It stayed too long to suit their restless temper,
 Or when they wished to stay, it bid them go.

It kept them so uncertain of the future!
 It wrote "IF GOD PERMIT," on every plan;
 It seemed to mock the wisdom of the wisest,
 And make a child of every full-grown man.

' OUR JOY IN HEAVEN.

LUKE ix. 28.-36.

Let us look a little at this scripture, as shewing what our joy in the glory will consist of. We have the warrant of 2 Peter i. 16, for saying that the scene represents to us the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is what we wait for. Our souls are not in a healthy state unless we are waiting for God's Son from heaven. The Church is not regulated in its hopes by the word and Spirit of God, unless it is looking for Him as Saviour from heaven. (Phil. iii.) And this passage as *disclosing to us specially what will be our portion when He comes*, is important to us in this respect. There are many other things in the passage, such as the mutual relations of the earthly and the heavenly people in the kingdom. These it may be very instructive to consider; but it is not our present purpose, which is to consider what light is here afforded on *the nature of the joy* which we shall inherit at and from the coming of the Lord. Other scriptures give instructions on the same subject, but let us now particularly look at the scene on the holy mount.

“And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, He took Peter and James and John and went up into a mountain to pray. And as He prayed the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening.” It was when Jesus was in the acknowledgment of depend-

ence—"as He prayed"—that this change took place. This, then, is the first thing we have here, a change such as will pass upon the living saints when Jesus comes.

"And behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias." *They were with Him.* And this will be our joy: *we shall be with Jesus.* In 1 Thess. iv., after stating the order in which the resurrection of the sleeping and the change of the living saints will take place, and that we shall both be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air, all the Apostle says as to what shall ensue is, "and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

But in this passage there is not only the being with Christ, but also familiar intercourse with Him. "There talked with Him two men." It is not that He talked with them, though this was no doubt true; but this might have been and they be at a distance. But when we read that they talked with Him, we get the idea of the most free and familiar intercourse. Peter and the others knew what it was to have such intercourse with Jesus in humiliation, and what joy it must have been to have the proof that such intercourse with Him would be enjoyed in glory!

And then it is said by Luke, that "they appeared in glory." But this is secondary to what we have been considering. We are told that *they were with Him*, and then that *they appeared in glory*, they share in the same glory as that in which He was manifested.

And so as to us, "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." "The glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, *and hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me.*"

But there is another thing still. We are not only told that they were with Him, that they talked with Him, and appeared in glory with Him, but we are also privileged to know the subject of their conversation. They "spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." *It was the cross* which was the theme of their conversation in the glory—the sufferings of Christ which He had to accomplish at Jerusalem; and surely this will be our joy throughout eternity, when in glory with Christ,—to dwell upon this theme, His decease accomplished at Jerusalem.

We next read that Peter and they that were with Him, were *heavy with sleep*. It shows us what the flesh is in the presence of God. Peter made a great mistake; but I pass on.

"While he thus spake, there came a cloud and overshadowed them, and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, this is My Beloved Son: hear Him."

Peter tells us that this voice came from the excellent glory, "For He received from God the

Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Now *Peter and the others had entered into the cloud*, and thus we get the wonderful fact, that in the glory from which the voice comes, *saints are privileged to stand*, and there, in that glory, *share the delight of the Father in His Beloved Son*. Not only are we called to the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ, we are called to have fellowship with the Father. We are admitted of God the Father to partake of His satisfaction in His beloved Son.

"And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone." The vision was gone, the cloud, the voice, the glory, Moses and Elias: but Jesus was left, and they are left to go on their way with Jesus, knowing Him now in the light of those scenes of glory which they had beheld. And this is the use to us, of those vivid apprehensions of spiritual things which we may sometimes realize. *It is not that we can be always enjoying them and nothing else*. But when for the season they have passed away, like this vision on the holy mount, they leave us alone with Jesus, to pursue the path of our pilgrimage with Him in spirit now, and with Him in the light and power of that deepened acquaintance with Him, and fellowship of the Father's joy in Him, that we have got on the mount; and thus to wait for the moment of His return, when all this, and more than our hearts can think of, will be fulfilled to us for ever.

THE LORD'S PATHWAY IN LUKE XXII.

In this particularly fine and solemn chapter, we may see the Lord in four connections, so to speak,—with *the sorrow itself* that was awaiting *Him*,—with *His disciples*,—with *the Father*,—with *the Enemy*.

Verses 1-23. As far as He is seen here, He is seen as looking directly, fully, and advisedly at the sorrow that was awaiting Him. He sits at the Paschal Table, the witness of His coming sufferings, and He tells of His body given, and of His blood shed; at the same time refusing *for the present* the paschal cup, the expression (as I judge) of Israel's joy on the accomplishing of their redemption.

Thus we see Him in full, advised anticipation of His sorrow, looking at it directly and without the least shrinking; refusing a single thought that could qualify or reduce it.

Verses 24-38. In this part of this great chapter we see Him with His disciples, but we must remember, carrying in His bosom the full sense of the sorrow He had just been foreseeing and counting on.

But it is, beloved, a great sight which these verses give us of Him. I mean in this character. When any trouble is upon us we judge right easily and without rebuke, that we may think of ourselves. *But here, Jesus thinks of others.* The con-

dition of His disciples is the anxious, diligent object of His various affections and sympathy. He warns them where their souls are getting wrong. He lets them know that He was praying for them, and providing strength for a coming hour of need and weakness. He teaches what changes they must now reckon upon, and how they must get themselves ready—thus, carrying as His heart did, a grief which might well have commanded or absorbed, He could, as though all were quiet within, spend His various cares, His sympathies and attentions, on those who were around Him.

If there be a moment in human history when selfishness is even vindicated by our moral sense, it is the moment of personal grief. We instinctively allow man to think of *himself* in such a moment. But at no other moment was the Lord Jesus ever more thoughtful of others than in the hour of Luke xxii.

It was not the hour of Sychar's well. It was not the two days spent amongst the Samaritans. It was not the season when Mary was sitting at His feet; or when the family of Bethany was at the table with Him. It was not such a moment as when the Centurion accosted Him in the language of a faith greater than what He had found in Israel; or as when the poor woman touched Him in the crowd; or as when the Syrophenician clung to Him in spite of apparent slight or indignity. Such occasions were moments of deep joy to the heart of Christ, and no wonder; to speak as a man, He was

free to wait on the occasion, and serve them, and think of others in them and through them. But it is the *Paschal* Jesus we get here. It is the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. It was natural for this Jesus of the house of Bethany to sit and teach,—but this was the Jesus of the last Passover; and knowing, as one does, the absorbing selfishness of times of sorrow, this path of the mind of Christ through part of this solemn chapter reflects something perfect and beautiful.

Verses 39-46. Here we have the same Jesus in company with the Father,—the *same Jesus*.

He had just been serving His disciples in all the various conditions and need in which He found them; warning them, praying for them, teaching them, providing for their blessing in every way. And so now He is surrendered to the Father's will, with the same self-sacrifice as He had been serving them. The moment is full in its terribleness, but the surrender of Himself to it is perfect. The mission of the angel to *strengthen*, tells that the cup was not to be taken out of His hand. He knew this, and felt it in the agony of that solemn hour. but nothing touched the spirit of self-sacrifice. The will of the Father was supreme with Him now, as the need and conditions of His poor disciples had just been, and He surrenders Himself to it all.

Verses 46-71. In these closing verses we find our Lord in His last condition in this chapter, as the prisoner of His enemies. We have already seen Him in the gaze and near sight of sorrow it-

self. Then in company with His disciples, making their need and blessing all His thought, as though He had no sorrow of His own. Then in communion with the Father,—and now in the midst of all His persecutors. There was nothing here for Him. A mad and rude rabble, set on wickedness, was making Him their sport and their captive; and then a wily and murderous, though in its way, refined Court of Elders (in its character more contrary to His spirit even than the others), purposing His death under the guise of law and religion. But in Him it is a blessed path we trace. He had been in communion with the Father. He had met His hour *there*. He had surrendered Himself, as we saw, and in that surrender there is victory, in that communion there is strength. And now that He is in the battle-field itself, He is more than conqueror. He may be borne through files of the enemy. He may meet the occasion in different characters of it; but all is strength and calmness of spirit. He challenges Judas the leader. He restores the wounded ear of one of the servants. He addresses the heads of the multitude. He has His eye upon Peter for good, when Peter was giving Him to feel at that moment that His disciples would take their place amongst His enemies. He answers the Elders and Priests. And in full triumph of His soul He anticipates His kingdom and glory. This was treading the field of battle like a Conqueror. All was perfect calmness of heart. There was no agony or sweat of blood here. No falling

on the ground. O how deeply the soul judges that that could not have been His way among the people, though it was equally perfectly His way before the Father! He had indeed already met the occasion in communion, and now He is only above it.

Such was His journey through this chapter; we see the path of His soul through these distinct stages. Was ever anything like it? *We* have need to be set to right in the time of trouble. The Psalmist had such need in Psalm lxxiii., and again also in Psalm lxxvii. Poor Job was conquered. It touched him and he fainted, though he had often before strengthened others. The stoutest, as an old writer says, are "knocked off their legs." Peter sleeps and Peter lies, and our own poor hearts again and again have told us secrets of ourselves in such moments. But in sorrow, the like of which never was tasted, Jesus is borne through every change of circumstance and connection, and all is sure to be perfection. Gold it was indeed; and when cast into the furnace, it comes out the same mass as when cast in, *for there is no dross.*

What a sight! what faith! It is found unto admiration in our eyes, beloved; and unto what acceptance was it found with God.

I feel as though I could not look at it, or speak of it longer. Having just traced this brilliant path of faith, tried in the furnace to the end, I must leave it. My own heart is so unacquainted with it. May the good Lord strengthen with might by His Spirit! "If thou faintest in the day of adversity thy strength is small."