

JESUS AT THE WELL OF SAMARIA.

JOHN IV.

There were two worn and weary ones
 That met at Jacob's well ;
 Both could of earth the emptiness
 And toil and sorrow tell :
 The one had sought in paths of sin
 Her happiness to gain ;
 And found, as all our hearts have found,
 She sought it there in vain.

She comes alone, for good report
 Her company would scorn ;
 Weary, degraded, desolate,—
 At mid-day not at morn :
 Scorched by the blazing sun above,
 Her conscience scorched within,
 Samaria's erring daughter proved
 The bitterness of sin.

But He, who sat by Jacob's well,
 Was weary-hearted too ;
 This earth He found a wilderness,
 In which no rest He knew :
 He toiled, He daily spent His strength,
 His loins were girded fast ;
 There were but " twelve hours in the day ;"
 He'd labour to the last.

From Zion's hill, and Judah's plains,
 To Gallilee He moved,—
 To seek and save the lost, intent ;
 This was the work He loved.
 Love brought Him down from heaven to earth,
 Our mis'ries touched His heart ;

Love made Him take a human birth,
With us to have a part.

Toil never out-wears love. Love toils
And finds its rest in toil ;
Love cannot rest, when those it loves
Are misery's sport and spoil ;
Love rests in work ; Love joys in pain,
If only it may bless
The objects of its care, and save
From suffering and distress.

The faithful Shepherd leaves the flock,
His one lost sheep to find ;
Follows its tracks o'er thorny wastes,
To toil and danger blind ;
And when His lost one He has found,
How great is His delight !
He bears it on His shoulders home,
And counts the burden light.

Hungry, and thirsty, weary too,
He sits on Jacob's well ;
But the strong thirstings of His love,
To rescue souls from hell,
Make Him forget all but her need,
All but His Father's will :
His meat, His drink, His one delight,
His mission to fulfil.

It was a task that needed all
His gracious skill, to win
That hardened heart and darkened mind,
So long enslaved by sin :
What wise and faithful tenderness,
In all His words we see !
Each one of us, O Lord, confess,
Thou didst the same for me.

And still, O Lord, Thou art the same,
 Though seated on the throne,
 As when, on that eventful day,
 Thy grace to her was shown :
 THYSELF, the *precious* gift of God,
 Givest those waters *free* ;
 And openest lips, like hers of old,
 To win fresh souls to Thee.

THE MIDDLE WALL BROKEN DOWN.

JOHN IV.

“ He that *ascended* is the same that *descended*, that he might fill all things” (Eph. iv). A *Lamb* was seen in the midst of the *throne* (Rev. v.) ; a *Lamb*, too, as it had been slain. It is He who *purged our sins* here, that is on high set down on *the right hand of the majesty* (Heb. i.). The One who was in the *form of God* became *obedient unto death* (Phil. ii.).

Such passages tell of elevation and of lowliness together ; full, ineffable nearness to God, and yet perfect nearness to us. It is as God and man in one Christ. The *history* of the blessed One is, thus like His *Person*.

Mystery of mysteries ! and yet the needful fact on which all depends, all of God’s glory in us, and of our blessedness in Him for ever.

The first chapter of John combines with these thoughts. Christ is there traced from the God-head to the altar ; and in touching these extreme

points, He is seen to occupy all the interval. He is the Creator of all things—the life and the light. The world was made by Him, and Israel were His own people. Made flesh, He dwelt among us, the Declarer of God, full of grace and truth. He is the Son in the bosom of the Father. He is the One that was before John; and yet, with all this, He was baptized by John. And to bring Him fully down to the extreme point of lowliness, He is the Lamb slain for the sin of the world.

In such titles and characters, we trace the Lord along this chapter. Extremes meet in Him. He is *God*, and yet *the Lamb on the altar*. Thus is He seen in His *Person*.

We then trace Him in His *ministry*, very much after the same manner (in the next chapters, ii.-iv.) from the highest elevation of ministerial *power and glory*, till He reaches the most marvellous condescendings of ministerial *grace*. As Lord of creation, He turns water into wine, not merely supplying but creating provisions for a feast. He is then, as Lord of life and death, saying "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then as the One who knows the thoughts long before, like God searching the heart, we read of Him, "He needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man." Then coming, as it were, out from the *glory* into the *grace* of ministry, He waits upon a poor, slow-hearted, timid soul, that sought Him by night, because, Gideon-like (Judges vi. 27), he was' afraid to seek

Him by day. And at last, He seeks a poor out-cast, and that, too, in the sweetest, richest condescension. He will be her debtor for the meanest of all gifts, a cup of cold water, that He may win her confidence. He will have all the secrets of her conscience out, that He may get Himself and His healing in. Wondrous! The One who began this course of ministry, as God turning the water into wine, here at the end of it appears as One who needed for Himself a cup of cold water at the hand of a stranger.

What a path is this!

But it is not merely the perfection of ministerial grace that is seen in this last action, the fulness of divine strength and glory is also in it. This asking for a cup of cold water was just what none could have done but God Himself.

Does this surprise us? It may at first, as the burning bush surprised Moses. But by listening and worshipping, we may find God in this action, as surely as Moses found Him in that bush.

God Himself, at the very beginning had raised a partition wall between Himself and His revolted creature. The cherubim at the gate of the garden, with his flaming sword, keeping every way the way of the tree of life, was as a partition wall. The difference between clean and unclean, set up and instituted in the earliest patriarchal times, was the same. (See Gen. viii. 20.) And the same middle wall was but strengthened by a thousand hands, under the direction of the lawgiver afterwards,

God's holiness demanding this testimony to itself in a polluted, departed world. God could not own such a dead and defiled thing. But God's grace found out a way whereby to bring His banished home to Him. That is, He has found out a way whereby He might be just while the justifier of a sinner. This is His glory, His *own* glory. "There is no God else beside me, *a just God and a Saviour*, there is none beside me." He who raised the middle wall *alone* can break it down. But this He has done. This He did by the cross, by the blood of His own Lamb. As soon as that was shed, as soon as the life was yielded up in sacrifice and for reconciliation, God Himself broke down all partition walls. The veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom, the rocks were rent also, and the graves of the saints were broken up. This great vista was thrown wide open, from the high heavens to the place of the power of death. Both the veil and the grave gave way, when Jesus gave up the ghost. The brightness of the highest heavens beamed upon the eye of the captives of death.

This virtue of the cross is accordingly now, in this gospel age, declared. "He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in his flesh the enmity." This great fact is published by the gospel, in order that sinners, believing that God Himself has done this—has, in grace, crossed the boundary, which separated us from Him—

might, by faith, cross it after Him, and meet Him in the place of reconciliation.

Now, this is the very thing that the Lord Jesus is doing at the well of Sychar. A partition-wall was there: the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. Rightly so. The Lord Himself had said to the twelve, "into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not." God had raised all partition-walls, whether by the ordinances of the law, among the circumcised patriarchs, or by the sword of the cherubim at the gate of Eden. And no hand of man or angel could, by his own authority or in his own strength, touch a stone of such a building. But God would not leave one stone of it upon another; and here, at the well of Sychar, Jesus anticipates that. He crosses the boundary. He asks drink of one who was a woman of Samaria. This was breaking down middle walls with a strong hand, and crossing boundary lines with a firm step. But He who had raised them in righteousness can break them down in grace through righteousness. And that is what Jesus actually does in the cross, and what He anticipates here.

All this was enough to amaze her who was on the opposite side—and it did so. She sees the ruin of the wall, and she marvels. But the Lord did not build again that which He had destroyed, but encourages her to do as He had done. In divine grace He had crossed the line from God's side of it, and He would fain draw her from that

side of it where sinners lay in their separation from God. And He accomplishes this.

But it is always the *conscience* that must do this. It is conscience that has put us on the other side. Conscience put Adam amongst the trees of the garden, and it is that which keeps us all "short of the glory of God," or of the divine presence in peace.

It is, therefore, the conscience that must cross the boundary, and it is that which Jesus brings across it on this occasion. He exposes her to herself, He convicts her, He lets her know all things that ever she did; but it is *in that very character* that she reaches him (see verse 29).

Have we crossed it, as she did? with all the recollections of conscience, without keeping back a secret, have we reached Him? If His glory were to break full in the twinkling of an eye, are we conscious, this moment, that we should not "come short" of it? As in spirit we sometimes sing:—

"The day of glory bearing
Its brightness far and near,
The day of Christ's appearing
We now no longer fear."

This is, indeed, with this sinner of Samaria, to be on the right side of the boundary line; to be treading with firm foot, on the ruin of all partition-walls in His *peaceful* presence now, and looking to be in His *glorious* presence for ever!

GROWTH THROUGH THE TRUTH.

(I PETER ii. 1-6.)

In one sense, as here taught us by the Spirit of God through the apostle, the healthful position of the saint is ever that of the "new-born babe;" whilst in another sense we are, of course, to be making progress so as to become young men and fathers in Christ. As to practical position of soul in receiving truth from God, it is that of the new-born babe; "as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." This is the place in which, as believers, we are set by the Spirit, in order that we may grow up into Christ.

But if we are "to grow by the sincere milk of the word," it is not by the exercise of our minds upon the word, nor yet even by great study of it merely; we need the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and in order to this, there must be the exercising of ourselves unto godliness—the "laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings," so that the Holy Spirit be not grieved. Has the Christian envy, guile, hypocrisies, allowed to work in his heart? There can be no growth in the true knowledge of the things of God. Therefore he is called upon to be ever a "new born babe," coming to receive, in the

consciousness of his own weakness, littleness, and ignorance, and in simplicity of heart, food from the word of God.

The Lord always keeps His simple dependent ones thus. "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." But then the knowledge of God always humbles; the more we know of Him, the more shall we know of our own emptiness. "If any man think he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." Just as the babe is constantly receiving nourishment from the mother, so need we to be constantly receiving spiritual nourishment from the word of God. When the word is received by us in faith, we become strengthened; we grow thereby in the knowledge of God, and of his grace. The apostle Paul, having heard of the faith of the Ephesians in the Lord Jesus, prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory," would "give unto them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of their understanding ('heart') being enlightened, that they might know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints," etc. Having "tasted that the Lord is gracious," we come to His word and receive from Him that which we need to comfort, nourish, and refresh our souls. The word always comes with savour from Himself; it is known as "the word of his grace." I may study the word again and again; but unless I get

into communion with Him by it, it will profit me nothing—at least at the time.

God reveals not His things "to the wise and prudent," but unto "babes." It is not the strength of man's mind judging about "the things of God," that gets the blessing from Him; it is the spirit of the "babe desiring the sincere milk of the word." He says, "open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." The strongest mind must come to the word of God as "the new-born babe."

And so too in speaking of God's truth; whenever we cannot "speak as the oracles of God," through the power of communion, it is our business to be silent. We should be cautious not to trifle with unascertained truth. Nothing hinders growth more than this—trifling with unascertained truth: we then act as masters and not as learners. Our position as regards the truth of God must be ever that of "new-born babes desiring the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby."

But there is nothing so hard for our hearts as to be humble—nothing so easy for them as to get out of this place of lowliness. It is not by precepts merely that we are either brought into this state, or preserved there; it is by "tasting that the Lord is gracious." It is quite true that God is a God of judgment—that He will exercise vengeance on His enemies; but this is not the way in which He stands towards the Christian. He is made known unto us as "the God of all grace;" and the posi-

tion in which we are set is that of "tasting that He is gracious."

How hard it is for us to believe this, that the Lord is gracious! The natural feeling of our hearts is, "I know that thou art an austere man." Are our wills thwarted? We quarrel with God's ways, and are angry because we cannot have our own. It may be perhaps that this feeling is not manifested; but still at any rate there is the want in all of us naturally of the understanding of the grace of God, the inability to apprehend it. See the case of the poor prodigal in Luke xv: the thought of his father's grace never once entered into his mind when he set out on his return, and therefore he only reckoned on being received as a "hired servant." But what does the father say? What are the feelings of his heart? "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; . . . for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." This is grace, free grace.

So too in the case of the woman of Samaria (the poor adulteress, ignorant of the character of Him who spake with her, "the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," and therefore the suited One to meet her need): the Lord says to her, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." Hadst thou only under-

stood what grace is, thou wouldest have asked, and I would have given !

It is not only when there is open rebellion against God, and utter carelessness and unconcern about salvation, that there is this darkness of understanding as to grace. Our natural heart has got so far away from God, that it will look to anything in the world—to the devil even—to get happiness ; anywhere but to the grace of God. Our consciences, when at all awakened to a sense of sin, and of its hatefulness in the sight of God, think that He cannot be gracious. Adam, had he known the grace of God, when he found himself naked, would at once have gone to God to cover him. But no, he was ignorant of it ; he saw his state, and he sought to hide himself from God amongst the trees of the garden. And so it is with us. The consciousness of being naked before God, apart from the understanding of His grace, makes us flee from Him.

Nay, further, as believers in Jesus, when our consciences come to be exercised, and we feel that we must have to do with God in everything, we may not have the distinct sense of the Lord's being gracious ; and there will then be not only a deep sense of our responsibility, but at the same time the thought that we have to answer to God's requirements, and shall be judged of Him according to the way in which we do so. There is a measure of the truth in this : the requirements of God must be met ; but then the wrongness is in

thinking that, if we do not find in ourselves what will please God, He will condemn us because of it.

On the other hand there is sometimes the thought that grace implies God's passing by sin. But no, quite the contrary ; grace supposes sin to be so horribly bad a thing that God cannot tolerate it. Were it in the power of man, after being unrighteous and evil, to patch up his ways, and mend himself so as to stand before God, there would then be no need of grace. The very fact of the Lord being gracious shows sin to be so evil a thing, that, man being a sinner, his state is utterly ruined and hopeless, and nothing but free grace will do for him—can meet his need.

A man may see sin to be a deadly thing, and he may see that nothing that defiles can enter into the presence of God : his conscience may be brought to a true conviction of sin ; yet this is not "tasting that the Lord is gracious." It is a very good thing to be brought even to that, for I am then tasting that the Lord is righteous, and it is needful for me to know it ; but then I must not stop there : sin without grace would put me in a hopeless state. Peter had not "tasted that the Lord was gracious " when he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord !" and therefore he thought that his sin unfitted him for the presence of the Lord.

Such too was the thought of Simon the Pharisee, respecting the poor woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wiped them with the

hairs of her head. Ah, if this man were a prophet (if he had known the mind of God), he would have sent away this woman out of his presence, "for she is a sinner." And why? Because he did not know that the Lord was gracious. He had a certain sense of the righteousness of God, but not the knowledge of His grace. I cannot say that God ought to be gracious; but I can say (if ignorant of His grace), that He ought to cast me, as a sinner, away from His presence, because He is righteous.

Thus we see that we must learn what God is to us, not by our own thoughts, but by what He has revealed Himself to be, and that is the "God of all grace."

The moment I understand (as Peter did) that I am a sinful man, and yet that it was because the Lord knew the full extent of my sin, and what its hatefulness was, that He came to me, I understand what grace is. Faith makes me see that God is greater than my sin, and not that my sin is greater than God: "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." As soon as I believe Jesus to be the Son of God, I see that God has come to me because I was a sinner and could not go to Him.

Man's ability to meet the requirements of the holiness of God has been fully tried: but the plainer the light came, the more did it show to man his darkness; and the stricter the rule, the more did it bring out his self-will. And then it

was, "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly"—"when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This is grace !

God, seeing the blood of His Son, is satisfied with it ; and if I am satisfied with it, this is what glorifies God.

But the Lord that I have known as laying down His life for me is the same Lord that I have to do with every day of my life ; and all His dealings with me are on this same principle of grace. Do I want to learn what His love is ? it is taught in the cross ; but He gave Himself for me in order that all the fulness and joy that are in Him might be mine. I must be a learner of it still—a newborn babe "desiring the sincere milk of the word that I may grow thereby."

The great secret of growth is the looking up to the Lord as gracious. How precious, how strengthening is it, to know that Jesus is at this moment feeling and exercising the same love towards me as when He died upon the cross for me ! This is a truth that should be used by us in the most common everyday circumstances of life. Suppose, for instance, I find an evil temper in myself, which I feel it difficult to overcome : let me bring it to Jesus as my friend, virtue goes out of Him for my need. Faith should be ever thus in exercise against temptation, and not simply my own effort ; my own effort against it will never be sufficient. The source of real strength is in the sense of the Lord's being gracious.

But the natural man in us always disallows Christ as the only source of strength and of every blessing. Suppose my soul is out of communion, the natural heart says, I must correct the cause of this before I can come to Christ: but He is gracious. And, knowing this, the way is to return to Him at once, just as we are, and then humble ourselves deeply before Him. It is only in Him, and from Him, that we shall find that which will restore our souls. Humbleness in His presence is the only real humbleness. If we own ourselves in His presence to be just what we are, we shall find that He will show us nothing but grace.

But though "disallowed indeed of men"—of the natural heart in everyone of us—who is this that says, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded?" It is God; He laid this corner stone, not man; and He says, This is what I think of Christ. By learning of God, through His teaching me by the Holy Spirit, I come to have the same thoughts about Jesus that He has. Here I find my strength, my comfort, my joy. That in which God delights and will delight for ever is now my joy also.

God says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" "mine elect in whom my soul delighteth;" and, working these (His) thoughts into my soul, I too see Jesus to be precious, and find my delight in Him. Thus He who was crucified for me—who "bare my sins in his own body

on the tree."—is precious to God and precious to me.

God could find no rest save in Jesus. We may look throughout the world, we shall find nothing which can satisfy our hearts but Jesus. If God looked for truth, for righteousness, all He could desire He found in Jesus ; and He found it in Him for us. Here is that which gives comfort to the soul. I see Jesus "now in the presence of God *for us*:" and God is satisfied, God delights in Him.

It is Christ Himself in whom God rests, and will rest for ever ; but then Jesus, having borne and blotted out my sins by His own blood, has united me to Himself in heaven. He descended from above, bringing God down to us here : He has ascended, placing the saints in union with Himself there. If God finds Jesus precious, He finds me (in Him) precious also.

Jesus, as man, has glorified God on the earth : God rests in that ; as man, having accomplished redemption, He "has passed into the heavens, now to appear in the presence of God for us." It is Jesus who gives abiding rest to our souls, and not what our thoughts about ourselves may be. Faith never thinks about that which is in ourselves as its ground of rest ; it receives, loves, and apprehends what God has revealed, and what are God's thoughts about Jesus, in whom is His rest.

It is not by human knowledge or intellect that we attain to this. The poor ignorant sinner, when enlightened by the Spirit, can understand how precious Jesus is to the heart of God, as well as the most intellectual. The dying robber could give a

better account of the whole life of Jesus than all around him, saying, "This man has done nothing amiss;" he was taught by the Spirit.

Are we much in communion with God, our faces will shine, and others will discover it though we may not be conscious of it ourselves. Moses, when he had been talking with God, wist not that the skin of his face shone; he forgot himself, he was absorbed in God. As knowing Jesus to be precious to our souls, our eyes and our hearts being occupied with Him, they will be effectually prevented from being taken up with the vanity and sin around; and this too will be our strength against the sin and corruption of our own hearts. Whatever I see in myself that is not in Him is sin; but then it is not thinking upon my own sins, and my own vileness and being occupied with them, that will humble me; but thinking of the Lord Jesus, dwelling upon the excellence in Him. It is well to have done with ourselves and to be taken up with Jesus. We are entitled to forget ourselves, we are entitled to forget our sins. we are entitled to forget all but Jesus. It is by looking to Jesus that we can give up anything, that we can walk as obedient children; His love constrains us. Were it simply a command, we should have no power to obey.

The Lord give us thus to be learners of the fullness of grace which is in Jesus, the beloved and elect One of God, so that "we may be changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

May we, beloved, in searching into the truth of God, "having tasted that the Lord is gracious," ever be found "as new-born babes desiring the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby!"

HUMILITY.

1. There is a difference between being humble before God, and being humbled before God. I am humbled before God, because I have not been humble. I am humbled, because of my sin. If I had been humble, I should have had grace given me to prevent it: for, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."

2. The only humble place is the presence of God. It is when I get out of His presence that I am in danger of being lifted up. People say it is dangerous to be too often on the mount. Now I do not think that it is when we are on the mount that we are in danger, but when we come off it. It is when we come off the mount that we begin to think that we have been there. Then pride comes in. I do not think that Paul needed a thorn when he was in the third heaven. It was after he had come down that he was in danger of being exalted above measure—from thinking that he had been where no one else had been.

3. I do not believe that to think badly of ourselves is true humility. True humility is never to think of ourselves at all—and that is so hard to come to. It is constantly, I, I, I. If you only begin a sentence with I, there is nothing that a person will not put after it.

4. What hearts have we! "I the Lord search the heart." Who but God can know them. Persons who think they search their hearts and are quick in their evil, do not really know their hearts, nor are they truly humble. The fact is, they *must* be talking of *themselves*, and their pride is nourished even by talking of how evil they are