

JESUS EVER NEAR.

*"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."
(Heb. xiii. 5.)*

O JESUS CHRIST, the Saviour,
We only look to Thee ;
'Tis in Thy love and favour
Our souls find liberty.
When Satan seeks to sift us,
And shipwreck we might fear,—
'Tis this o'er all will lift us,
That *Thou* art ever near.

Yes, though the tempest round us
Seems safety to defy ;
Though rocks and shoals surround us,
And billows swell on high—
Thou dost from all protect us,
And cheer us by Thy love ;
Thy counsels still direct us
Safe to the rest above.

There with what joy reviewing
Past conflicts, dangers, fears,—
Thy hand our foes subduing,
And drying all our tears,—
Our hearts with rapture burning,
The path we shall retrace,
Where now our souls are learning
The riches of Thy grace.

LAW AND PRIESTLY GRACE.

(Numbers xvii., xx.)

Putting these two chapters together, we see the grace of God in priestly government, to bring His redeemed through the wilderness, and also the contrast between law and priestly grace,

This grace is drawn out by Israel's sin ; but grace does not, of course, allow sin. Law could not bring the people into the land. Law must have kept the whole nation out, except Joshua and Caleb, who followed the Lord fully. We see its actings in chapter xvi., in the judgment that fell on Korah and his company. If when redeemed we were put under the law, we should be no better off than before. Still, God cannot allow sin. Neither could He give the people up ; for had He not redeemed them ? as Moses pleaded with Him (Num. xiv. 13-16), " And Moses said unto Jehovah, Then the Egyptians shall hear it (for Thou broughtest up this people in Thy might from among them), and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land saying, Because Jehovah was not able to bring this people into the land which He sware unto them, therefore He hath slain them in the wilderness." He cannot give them up ; He cannot allow sin, and therefore He brings in priestly grace to meet the difficulty. To take away their murmurings, He does not use the rod of Moses, but that of Aaron. The rod of Moses could only judge them for their sin, and thus take away their murmurings by *judgment*. But Aaron's does it by priestly grace.

God makes it very manifest by whom He will act. Aaron's rod is chosen out of the twelve, and the remarkable sign of its blossoming and yielding fruit, shewed that priesthood was connected with life-giving power, as well as with intercession. Both are needed to uphold them, and to raise them when failing. " The last Adam was made a quickening spirit." This is the care and authority by which we are led through the wilderness. God will allow no other, and no other would do. The priesthood of Christ alone can carry us through.

It is the rod of authority too ; for " Christ is a son over His own house." But we see that unbelief cannot avail itself of this. " And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of Jehovah shall die : shall we be consumed with dying ? " (xvii. 12, 13). God had shewn them that there was this grace, and they ought to have trusted in it, especially as they had seen the power in Aaron's remaining in among the congregation, and staying the plague. They had ground for full assurance ; but unbelief prevailed. They were insensible to the value of the priesthood, and their conscience was still under law. For they did not know God, though at the very moment He was acting for them in priestly grace.

The circumstances of chapter xx. put them to the test : the outward power, too, that had brought them out of Egypt was passing away from their minds. Miriam, the expression of it, had died. When apparent power decays, faith is put to the test. Afterwards Moses passed away too. Unbelief does not get the refreshment that faith does. There is no water. They were in a terrible state of mind—wishing they had shared the judgment that had fallen on their brethren ; for there was no confidence in Jehovah. Yet they called themselves the congregation of Jehovah. They had the pride, but not the comfort, of it. Moses and Aaron fell on their faces. There seemed no remedy. But Jehovah appeared. He was the only remedy. And He makes Aaron's rod the means of the application of that remedy. It had already been appointed before the occasion for its exercise occurred. There was real need, and God never denies this. He never says it is

(not real need ; but He will have us go to Christ to meet the need. ✓ It was not to be Moses's rod, for then it must be judgment. ✓ Nor was the rock to be *smitten* again. That water could be had now without smiting the rock was the result of its having been smitten before by the rod of judgment.

(So it is with us. ✓ Everything comes to us through Christ's *having been* on the cross ; and we do not need the cross again, but the priestly work. It was now, " *Speak ye unto the rock before their eyes, and it shall give forth his water.*" Speak the word only, and the water shall flow. All things are ours ; we draw nigh now, not for acceptance, but to have our need supplied. In verses 9, 10, we see that Moses was vexed, and spake unadvisedly. ✓ He could not rise to the height of God's grace ; and that was why he could not enter the land. He was in a better mind the first time Israel murmured. Then he said, " Your murmurings are not against *us*, but against Jehovah " (Ex. xvi. 8) ; now he says, " Must *we* fetch you water out of this rock ? " setting up Aaron and himself, and using Jehovah's authority to do it. He *smites* the rock too. There would really have been more glory to Moses if he had *spoken* instead of smiting, but he did not see this.

(God called Aaron's rod "*the rod.*" The other was set aside. They were never under that rod again. ✓ It is Christ for us, or nothing. Any other principle must have dealt with them as with Korah. It is only a *word* now, and every blessing flows. To smite the rock again would be the same as saying, because we fail Christ must die again. ✓ It is denying grace to say that anything is needed now except intercession. ✓ To " sanctify Him " would be to give Him credit for all that He is, as He has revealed Himself. ✓ To " sanctify Him in

our hearts" is to attach to Him all that He is. But Moses did not do this. He did not count upon God's grace, which was all that was needed. But does God stop His grace because of this? Does He stop the outflowing of the water to quench their thirst? No, He does not! If Moses failed to sanctify Him before the people, He will only the more sanctify *Himself* before them. He comes in Himself when the one who should act fails. Just as when the disciples, who ought to have been able to cast the evil spirit out of the child, failed in doing so, Jesus, coming down from the mount of transfiguration, said, "Bring him to Me." It was wrong that they could not cast him out, but His own personal interference was gained through it. He gives the people the water they need, in spite of Moses's unbelief and their murmuring. *He* will act according to the rod of His appointing, if *Moses* does not.

Thus Christ never fails in carrying on that which as Priest He has undertaken. Israel should have walked under the power and comfort of that rod. They saw the blossoms and the fruit, and should have counted on it. If there is anything we want, and we doubt of getting it, because we say we do not deserve it, that is putting ourselves under law. It is forgetting that there is "the rod;" and that it is, "speak the word only." God takes away the murmurings by grace. He deals with all our evil, as His children, in grace. Look at Peter's case. Was it because he repented that Jesus prayed for him that his faith should not fail? We know it was not. And was it because Peter wept that the Lord turned and looked upon him? It was afterwards that he wept. When we do wrong, priestly grace acts for us, and obtains for us grace to see, and con-

fess, and put it away. Christ probes the heart of Peter, but does not leave him in the evil. This is the privilege of His children. Grace sends the gospel to the world. Grace gives priesthood to the church. It all originates in God. If I sin, it is not I who go to the Priest, but He goes to God for me. It is not said, If a man *repents*, but if he *sins*, "we have an advocate with the Father." When, through the action of priestly grace, a sense of my sin is given me, I go to God for strength against it. It is He who obtains that for me which brings me back to God. All this is the fruit of His unsolicited grace. It was God who appointed the rod. ✓ He is "the God of all grace," in spite of all our evil; and when we see it we are confounded. Carrying us through the wilderness is as much grace as redemption and forgiveness. Even when Israel strove with God, He was "sanctified in them." ✓ It is very sad to have "Meibah" (chiding, or strife) written on any part of our history—sad as to us—but He makes it an opportunity for His grace. *They* get just what they want, though Moses is shut out from Canaan. ✓ He would make them know the extent of His grace. Another time grace might act in a different way—in chastening, perhaps, if needed; but this taught them what the character and extent of the grace was. Just the same grace that spoke in Isaiah xliii. 22: "Thou hast been weary of me." I have not wearied thee, but "Thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities." What language for God to use! Yet He goes on: "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for my own sake" (vs. 24, 25). Nothing can make us more ashamed of our unbelief than this astonishing grace. And all because of Christ. Nothing makes us hate sin like this.

TWO WARNINGS AND AN EXAMPLE.

(Substance of a Lecture on Matthew xxvi.)

We have here—an example in the case of Jesus, and two warnings in Peter and in Judas.

In Peter we may learn the weakness, and in Judas the dreadful wickedness, of the flesh. We get in Jesus what we should aim after.

In Judas we see the mere professor, in Peter the saint sifted. All three are before us in a time of searching trial, and the result of trial is seen in each.

We ought to remember that now we who are believers have received the Holy Ghost, which Peter had not when he denied the Lord; yet, having the Holy Ghost, we may still learn a lesson from Peter's flesh. And is not the entire worthlessness of the flesh among the last things we learn? In Peter we see what the flesh is.

There is no real living upon the hope of the glory, except in the measure as the flesh is mortified and brought under subjection.

I would dwell, first, upon Judas's apostasy. He had all the appearance to men of being as the other disciples; he had companied with the Lord, he had been one of those sent forth to preach the gospel and work miracles; but his conscience never was before God. He might have truth in his understanding (and, indeed, the understanding does not generally receive truth so readily where the conscience is affected). Again, Judas could

not have walked three years with Jesus, and seen His grace and not have had his affections moved. But then his conscience had never been brought into exercise before God. So it is with many. If we watch the saint receiving truth, we shall often find him slow of apprehension. There is something to be judged before God ; something which condemns him, and which involves sacrifice. For instance, we see most clearly that the precious blood cleanses from all sin ; but only let us commit sin—and how slowly do we apprehend that blessed truth so as to get the comfort of it ! In the latter case the conscience is at work. In like manner the affections of the unconverted may be moved—a great company of women followed Christ at the crucifixion, bewailing and lamenting Him ! So we read of “ Anon with joy receiving, and by and by (or ‘anon,’ for it is the same word), when tribulation arises, turning away.”

The natural man wants something to satisfy self before God ; and, until he has done with himself, he will be looking for a certain measure of righteousness before God. He may have been, in connection with this want, instructed in the gospel, and thus the understanding may be clear, and the affections moved ; but, unless the conscience be bare before God, there is no *life*.

Judas loved money—no uncommon lust. And the love of money in a saint now-a-days is as bad, or worse, as being done more in the light.

There was sin in Judas's nature : which sin

shewed itself in the shape of the love of money. The next thing was, Satan suggesting a way of gratifying this lust, for he loved money more than he loved Jesus. And now we find the result of outward nearness to the Lord while the conscience is unaffected :—it was to make Judas reason upon circumstances. He thought, probably, the Lord would deliver Himself, as He had done before ; for, when he found it not so, he threw down the money, and said, “ I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” He continues in this nearness to Christ, until, thirdly, we read that “ after the sop Satan entered into him.” In the condition of hypocrisy he gets his heart hardened ; and then Satan gets between his conscience and all hope of pardon. Many a natural man would not betray his friend with a kiss, as Judas soon after did. His nearness served to harden him ; and he actually took the sop from the hand of the Lord ! Even natural feeling was silenced. So it is when the unconverted man gets into a similar position. He becomes more vile than ever. His heart is hardened. Hypocrisy, and at length despair, ensues. Such is the flesh and its end. And the flesh cannot be bettered by ordinances, even where Christ Himself is. Such is the flesh—I can hardly say, when left to itself, for man is never left to himself, he is never really independent. He has the will to be so ; therefore he is perfectly a sinner, but if disobedient, he is servant to his lust, “ disobedient and deceived, serving divers lusts

and pleasures," and slave to Satan. A natural man has a conscience and shame. He will not do in the light what he would in the dark. But the outward form of Christianity, where it has not touched the heart, only makes this difference, that his conscience is seared, and he is only more subtly the slave of Satan.

I now turn to the contrast afforded by what is seen in Peter with what is seen in our blessed Lord. In Jesus we see the obedient, the dependent One, expressing His entire dependence by His praying. And there was seen an angel from heaven strengthening Him. He felt the weakness which He had given Himself up to bear; He was "crucified through weakness." "All my bones," He says, "are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels." "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here and watch with me." So in the earlier temptation, we hear Him answering the devil out of the word of God. Jesus might have sent Satan away by divine power, but this would have been no example to us. So, in this chapter, we see the Lord praying!

If you compare what Peter is doing with what the Lord is doing, you learn the secret of Peter's weakness and the Lord's strength. What was the effect of trial upon the weakness of Peter's flesh? He had said, "I will go with thee to prison and to death;" but the Lord has to say to him, "could ye not watch with me one hour?" They

were sleeping for sorrow. Here was neither prison nor death! "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (not merely that there be no transgression). Peter entered into temptation; Jesus never did at all. Yet the trial was far greater to Jesus. Jew and Gentile were against Him, and behind them the power of Satan. "This," said He, "is your hour, and the power of darkness," and again, "my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Where does He take all this? The Lord does not sleep and seek to forget His sorrow. He goes and prays to the Father. His eye rested not on the circumstances to think of them. He looked to His Father. Not that He did not feel; for He said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." It was weakness here as man, and that is real strength.

Remember, if we are in entire dependence, the temptation does not meet *us* at all. Jesus does not say, "shall I not go through all these trials?" but "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" He does not see Pilate or Judas in it; it was not Satan that had given Him the cup, but His Father. So with us; if in a frame of entire dependence, temptation does not touch us at all! Trial comes; but, like Jesus, we can say of it, "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Every trial becomes a blessed occasion for perfecting obedience, if near God; if otherwise, a temptation! Jesus was walking with God. It was not that He did not

feel weakness. "Tarry ye here, and watch with me," shews the weakness of human nature fully felt. As in Psalm xxii. 14, referring to the cross, He says, "I am poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels." And yet He shrank not from suffering alone when love to His disciples called for it. "If ye seek me, let these go their way." But being in an agony, He prays the more earnestly; it drives Him to His Father; and that before the trial comes. Then what is the next thing? When the trial actually comes, it is already gone through with God! He presents Himself before them, saying, "whom seek ye?" as calmly as if going to work a miracle. Whether before Caiaphas or Pontius Pilate, He makes a good confession; owns Himself Son of God before the Jews, and King before Pilate!

How comes this difference? In the first place, with Peter the flesh is sleeping; he goes to sleep to get rid of the pressure of circumstances. Peter has not gone through the trial with the Father. At the moment when Jesus is going to be led away, the energy of the flesh wakes up, and Peter draws the sword. The flesh has just energy enough to carry us into the danger where it cannot stand—that energy deserts us then. How little real communion is here! When Christ was praying, Peter was sleeping; when Christ was submitting as a lamb led to the slaughter, Peter was fighting; when Christ was confessing in suf-

fering, Peter was denying Him with cursing and swearing. This is just the flesh : sleeping when it ought to be waking ; in energy when it ought to be still ; and then denying the Lord when the time of trial comes. With Christ it was agony with the Father, but perfect peace when the trial came. Oh, if we knew how to go on in all circumstances in communion with the Father, there would be no temptation that would not be an occasion of glorifying Him !

The great thing was, Peter had not learned what the flesh is ; he did not keep in memory the weakness of the flesh ; and thus the condition of dependence was hindered. He seems to be sincere in wishing to own the Lord Jesus and not deny Him. There was more energy of natural and very true affection in Peter than in those who forsook the Lord and fled. He really loved the Lord. Peter fails, not from self-will, not from willingness to sin, but through the weakness of the flesh. In Christ there was no possible moral weakness, because He always walked in the place of weakness in communion with His Father. Jesus goes—through agony itself—with the Father. Peter fails, though but the shadow of temptation comes to him. All Peter's fall began by want of dependence, and by neglecting prayer. We must be watching "unto prayer ;" not merely ready to pray when temptation comes, but walking with God, and so meeting it in the power of previous communion and prayer. Without continual prayer,

and constant sense of entire weakness in self, the more love to Christ, and the more good-will to serve Him are in a saint, the more certainly will he, by that very good-will, be led into the place in which he will dishonour Christ! The other disciples that fled did not so much dishonour the name of their Master as Peter did.

It was thus Peter had to learn the evil of the flesh. Jesus, on the contrary, ever walked in the confession of dependence—always prayiug. And what use did the Lord make of His knowledge of Satan's purpose to sift Peter? He prayed for him! The more knowledge, dear fellow-believer, the more prayer! "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." As the result of this intercession, Peter learnt the evil of the flesh more deeply than the others, and was able to "strengthen his brethren."

We are incapable of ministering truth to our brethren unless we are conscious of weakness in ourselves. Without the prayer of Jesus, where would Peter have been? He was running nearly like Judas. Oh, what a blessed thing to be kept in entire consciousness of our weakness, instead of running on like Peter into a place where we cannot stand! How good to be afraid to take a single step without the Lord's guidance! The flesh is ever playing us false—it is good for nothing. The effect of keeping it in the Lord's presence is to have done with it—to be cast on the Father. There is no wisdom that will stand us in

any stead but the wisdom that is from above. The Lord knew what the flesh was, and what Paul needed, when he had been caught up into the third heaven. To be taken up into a fourth? No; but a messenger of Satan to buffet: that is, he needed to be brought down. There is the thorn in the flesh given him; there is to be the consciousness that the flesh is worth nothing.

We may notice that there are three ways of learning the power and wretchedness of the flesh: prior to peace, often in desperate struggles (for knowledge and conscience are distinct things); when we have peace before the Lord in prayer and communion, not daring to take a step till He leads us, and then He is glorified in us in grace and obedience, whatever the trial; or in the bitter experience in which Peter learned it, when flesh is not judged in communion with God. This last will be the way, so long as we are judging of things instead of judging ourselves. When we are faithfully judging ourselves and walking with God, we shall enter into no temptation. Trial may come, but there will be full preparation to meet it; not that we may be able to say, "now I am prepared for this or that temptation." We are in no certainty from one moment to another as to what trial may be coming; but we shall have the strength of God with us in it. Therefore our only safe place is watching and prayer—yes, prayer before the assault—prayer that may amount to agony; for so Jesus prayed!

We must expect to have our souls much exercised; often, it may be, when trial is there, casting about as to why this trial is sent. It may be for a fault; it may be for some careless or hard state of soul. It may be, as Paul's, to keep down the flesh; it may be preparatory to some coming

conflict. But in these exercises of soul we must keep before the Lord : then, when the trial comes for which the Father has been training us, there will be perfect peace. The Lord will make you bear in spirit with Him, when exercised, the burden which He will make you bear in strength in the battle. Do not shrink from inward exercise ; settle it with Him. There is no limit to our strength for obedience when our strength is the Lord's.

“ If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” None of our souls can estimate what that cup was for One who had dwelt essentially in the Father's love ; but the most spiritual will most acknowledge it. Then holiness itself was made sin ; no one gleam of light on the soul of Jesus. At the thought of it, when pressed by Satan on His soul, we see Him sweating as it were great drops of blood. He did not think lightly of sin ! The Prince of life was brought into the dust of death : “ All thy billows passed over me.” At the cross Jesus bore what you (who are believers) will never be called to bear. Beware of denying Him. Many do so in detail who in the main acknowledge Him. Our happy privilege is, not to be occupied with the trial as a trial, but to see in every trial an opportunity of obeying God, and to say of each, as Jesus did, “ The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it ? ”

“ NOW UNTO HIM THAT IS ABLE TO KEEP YOU FROM FALLING (‘STUMBLING’), AND TO PRESENT YOU FAULTLESS BEFORE THE PRESENCE OF HIS GLORY WITH EXCEEDING JOY, TO THE ONLY WISE GOD OUR SAVIOUR, BE GLORY AND MAJESTY, DOMINION AND POWER, BOTH NOW AND EVER ! AMEN.” (*Jude 24, 25.*)