

THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

VOL. I.

FEBRUARY, 1921.

No. 2.

A Series of Lenten Addresses.

Delivered at the American Theater, St. Louis, March 1—5, 1920.

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Jesus:

I. The Light of the World.

JOHN 8, 12.

Less than a hundred years ago one of the world's greatest thinkers is reported to have exclaimed upon his deathbed: More Light. He had lived in a so-called Christian country, had been reared in the Christian religion, and had made the customary professions of the Christian faith in his early youth. In the battle of life, however, with its passions and its emotions he had lost most of his Christian character, had delved deep into the Pyerian spring of human learning, and though admittedly one of the colossal minds of all ages, with a knowledge of earthly wisdom, of the ways, the feelings, and the experiences of men such as few men ever had, on his deathbed the great Goethe had to cry out for more light. In the presence of death he was enshrouded in darkness.

About four thousand years ago there lived in a far eastern country, among Gentile peoples, a man who is described in Sacred Writ as perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil. He had been blessed by God in family, in riches, in friends. But under a permissive providence of God all was taken from him, and with his own body wasting away with putrefying sores, and his own wife tilting him with the advice to "bless God and die," old Job is portrayed as lifting up his voice, and with a vision that transported his believing soul, is recorded to have exclaimed: "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Nearly two thousand years ago there lived in Jerusalem, the

sacred city, a man, just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. It had been revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And coming by the Spirit into the Temple when the parents brought in the Child Jesus to do for Him after the custom of the law, he took Him up into his arms, blessed God and said: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

These three instances exemplify the truth of the words of Jesus of Nazareth when He says: "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Job, surrounded by Gentile people, with the vision of the Messiah promised by God from the beginning, with the faith that enclosed the coming Redeemer from sin and all of sin's dire consequences, with a hope that enlightened his life, in the presence of impending death, has light, yes, the light of life. Simeon with the Christ-child in his arms, with the faith once delivered unto the saints in his heart, in the valley of the shadow of death fears no evil, but invites death, having the light of life. But Goethe, surrounded by Christian communities, but without Christ, in spite of all earthly learning, is in darkness, and in the presence of death cries out for "more light."

The world without Jesus is in darkness.

Without Jesus the world is in intellectual darkness. It does not understand man's origin, his end, or aim. It does not know him as the object of the Maker's love, beloved even after man's rebellion. It does not know man as God's beneficiary of the universe, the heir of mansions prepared for him before the foundations of the earth were laid. Jesus only sheds that light.

Without Jesus the world is in moral darkness. Thanks to a benevolent Maker the world still has a sense of right and wrong, by reason of the Law written in the human heart, still has a moral balance, called conscience, though rusted much by lack of use. But under the deluding influence of the Prince of Darkness, this moral sense with its balance is not at all reliable. Our times have emphasized this fact nigh beyond belief. Every law of God as well as every law of man was violated whenever it conflicted with momentary worldly interests. Humanity, the law of love for friend as well as foe, was ridiculed, the duty of justice and of mercy was

held in contempt. And in this darkness the world nigh perished. It cannot be otherwise. Without Jesus the world has no real knowledge or perception of that righteousness which is properly a part of the image of God in man, that righteousness which is primarily a matter of the heart, the root of righteous thoughts, and words, and acts. Without Jesus the world is ignorant of its real duty toward God and man, and in its moral darkness cannot reach the lofty heights that commend mercy "because your Father in heaven is merciful," that insist that we "love our enemies," pray for them, and, if needs be, die for them. Jesus only sheds that light.

Without Jesus the world is in spiritual darkness. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned." The world is by nature blind in the matters that are spiritual. Without Jesus the world cannot discern, cannot believe, the things that human eye hath not seen, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus, lifted up on the cross, alone can draw all men unto Himself, can shed the light that enlightens the human heart, that warms it, and out of its regenerated soil brings forth the good fruits of Christian faith.

Yes, Jesus is the Light of the world.

It is out of the realization of this fact, the fact that Jesus is the world's intellectual, moral, and spiritual light, that Isaiah, in view of Jesus' coming shouts to his people: "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people, but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

This being so, should Christians not continually dwell in that light? And since Jesus Himself has said: "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me," should Christians not be fervent students of that Word? We cannot live our natural lives without the natural sun, its light; how can we hope to live our spiritual lives without Jesus, the Light of the world? We need Him. We need our Bibles.

And again, Jesus being the Light of the world, should we, who have come to that Light, not show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light? The world needs Him, for still it is true, "the Light shineth in darkness,

and the darkness comprehendeth it not." How great is the world's unrest in these our days! Should we not minister to the world's great needs? Jesus alone can shed the light that can enlighten, and warm, and heal the world's great wounds. Let the Light shine.

Jesus:

II. The Bread and the Water of Life.

JOHN 6, 48; 4, 14.

A vast multitude had followed Jesus. They had been miraculously fed with bread and with fishes. They would make Jesus their king. They had followed Him over the Sea of Tiberias, they shrank from no labor to find Him, for He had been their bodily benefactor.

Jesus, who knew what was in man and needed not that any man should tell Him, said to them: "Verily, verily I say unto you, Ye seek Me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." Then Jesus added: "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you; for Him hath God the Father sealed." John 6, 26. 27.

And then follows that remarkable dissertation in which Jesus presents Himself as the Bread of Life of which, if any man eat, he shall never hunger more.

A woman approaches Jesus at the well of Samaria. She is seeking water. Jesus converses with her and in the course of that conversation tells her: "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water," and: "Whosoever drinketh of this water that I shall give unto him shall never thirst." John 4, 11. 14.

In these two texts Jesus stands before the world as the Bread and the Water of Life."

As to the meaning of these words, there can be no doubt. They are clear in the places where they are found. Jesus is the spiritual nourishment and refreshment of the soul. The sacred Book abounds in evidences of the experience of their truth. One of the most beautiful of these we find in the 23d Psalm, the Psalm of Jesus the Good Shepherd. In its first verses we read: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul, He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me,

Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." David had found the Messiah, and He was to him the spiritual Bread and the Water of Life to nourish and to refresh his immortal soul.

The human soul needs food. It needs it as really as the body needs its food. Every faculty of the soul, the understanding, the will, the affections, cry out for their food for their sustenance, for their strengthening, for their development. Without its food the soul hungers and thirsts.

But where outside of Jesus is there satisfaction for the human soul? Man at all times has recognized the soul's unstilled yearnings; has sought to define it and to find its rest. The human eye has searched, and the human ear listened; every human sense has sacrificed itself in the service; but the soul's hunger has never thus been stilled, its thirst never thus been quenched. All earthly treasure, all gold and silver and their equivalents cannot satisfy the soul. Earthly pleasure, the world's giddy pastimes and its sensualities, cannot satisfy the soul. Earthly pomp and glory, this world's choicest honors, cannot satisfy the soul. Yes, if it were possible for man to gain the whole world, he might with it all yet lose his soul.

Where, then, is the soul's true satisfaction? Nowhere there among the things for which the world so much labors. The food of this world is all perishable, and its water lacks the life that abides. The soul yearns for something better.

Our texts point to Him who alone can satisfy the human soul.

The soul yearns for God. Consciously or unconsciously it joins in the words of the Psalmist: "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God." Jesus reveals God. Yes, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Jesus has declared God to man as the heavenly Father, who, though He hates sin, yet loves the sinner; as the God, who "so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"; as the God who for Jesus' sake, for the sake of Jesus' suffering and death, forgives man's sin, declares man just and righteous. Yes, Jesus has declared God as a Father who feels with us in all our infirmities, earthly woes, and sorrows, will hear us if we cry to Him, will help us and eventually completely save us. Jesus has revealed God to us as a God of love.

Thus declaring God, Jesus satisfies the human soul. Beholding God by faith in Jesus Christ the soul is satisfied.

The soul hungers and thirsts after righteousness; a righteousness that is real, that is perfect. Jesus reveals it. Himself the great Prophet, Jesus reveals Himself as the great High Priest who once and for all entered into the Holy Place to render a satisfaction for the sin of the world. He is the High Priest that is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, who knew no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. By His own and active obedience He approved Himself the Righteous One. And then He "offered up Himself" for the sin of the world: "With His stripes we are healed." Yes, Jesus is made unto us of God "righteousness."

Thus revealing Himself, Jesus satisfies the human soul. Beholding Jesus the soul is satisfied.

The soul yearns for rest; rest in the full sense of the term. The soul yearns for rest in itself. Jesus conveys it. Having declared God to the world, having died for the world, Jesus the risen Savior addressed His disciples, saying: "Peace be unto you." What peace? Peace with God, indeed. But more than this; peace within our souls. Yes, Jesus conveys the "peace of God that passeth all understanding," the joy that no man taketh from us.

Offering and conveying that peace, Jesus satisfies the human soul.

We are living in a time of great unrest. The world seems to be rocking in its very foundations. What is the real cause of it all? Reach down deep into the world's uncasiness, its lovelessness, its hopelessness. What is at the bottom of it all? Is it not the restlessness of the human soul that has lost its bearings, has lost its place in the everlasting arms of God? What is our duty then? Knowing Jesus as the Bread and the Water of Life that satisfies the soul, what else than this: to minister to the world according to its great need. Partaking ourselves more and more of Him, it should be our Christian occupation to preach Jesus to the world. Him hath God the Father sealed; He bears the stamp of the world's unimpeachable Food Commissioner.

III. "I Am the Vine, Ye Are the Branches."

JOHN 15, 5.

These words were spoken by Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed. They were spoken presumably in that upper room in Jerusalem, where for the last time during His earthly ministry for our salvation He had drunk of the fruit of the vine, where He had eaten with His disciples the last Passover of the Old Covenant, and where He instituted the Passover of the New Covenant

in which He gives us His body to eat and His blood to drink for the forgiveness of sin and for the sealing of our faith in Himself as our Deliverer from death.

These words express an intimate relation between Jesus and His disciples. In fact, they indicate an organic spiritual connection between Jesus and the believer. Paul expresses the same fact when he pictures the believers as the body whose spiritual head is Jesus. Jesus and His disciples are most intimately and closely related.

And this relation is constant. Jesus says: "I *am* the Vine, ye *are* the branches." The sap of the vine flows continually into the branches; the strength of Jesus is constantly communicated to His disciples. Jesus supplies all spiritual power, is the Author and the Finisher of our faith in the fullest sense of the words, supplies all real fruitfulness, enables us to live the life of Christian fellowship with Him.

The figure of our text, therefore, is most interesting and instructive.

In the first place it emphasizes the fact that in Christian discipleship Jesus is always *first and fundamental*. First Jesus, then the branches. Jesus the Foundation, then the spiritual superstructure. Our text thus visualizes all that which is presupposed in Biblical Christianity. It refers back to the time of which John says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." It refers back into the very arcanum of the divine decree that determined to "put enmity" there where Satan would put harmony, to crush the power of the Evil One, by the suffering and the death of the "Woman's Seed." This text includes all that was written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man, of His innocent suffering and death. It refers the spiritual vision to the act of God of which Jesus Himself spoke when He said: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It presupposes the sacrificial death of Jesus for the sin of the world; in short, the Jesus of the Bible. It presupposes Jesus of whom the Scriptures say: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid," Jesus. He is the Vine; without Him there can be no branches. Jesus is first and fundamental in that great communion of saints that hopes to be saved through Him in the final judgment.

This is of the greatest importance in our day in connection with those movements that intend or involve the breaking down

of the confessional bars in the Christian Church's activity of evangelizing the world. The so-called community church that opens its gates to all on the basis of a mere confession of good will, that presupposes no confessional basis concerning Jesus, His person or His work, that in other words insists on no denial of error or of self, but involves a denial of Jesus as the Savior of the world, this so-called church violates the very first principle of Christ's Church on earth. It attempts to grow branches without the vine.

The figure of our text further stigmatizes the apostasy of a large part of nominal Christianity of our day. Many call themselves Christian, both individuals and churches, and yet deny the Christ that bought them. They deny the divine Jesus, the representative atonement, the efficacy of the Sacraments, in fact, every distinctively Christian doctrine, and yet appropriate the name of Jesus. In other words, they sacrifice the Vine, and still insist that they be branches.

In the second place our text emphasizes the fact that the disciples are always secondary and relative. First Jesus, then the believer. But, the branches being united with the vine, they are secondary only to the vine and in that relationship represent its strength, its power, its influence. The life of the vine pulsates in the branches and all of its mysterious and refreshing fruitfulness is exercised and manifested through those branches. Cut off the branch, and it is dead; but connected with the vine and maintained in healthy growth, all the vine's effectiveness is alive and active in the branch.

In this light we must understand the complaint of our day, now so frequently heard, that the Church has lost its power. To be sure, the Church and every Christian lose their power in the proportion that they lose Jesus. In the proportion, therefore, that the Church removes Jesus from its pulpit and substitutes other themes, no matter how attractive and even generally necessary, in that proportion the Church loses Jesus, His power and His influence. The church, however, that with the apostle can say, that in its Christian ministry to the world it has determined to know nothing save Jesus, and Him crucified, that church has not lost its power, the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. That church, moreover, is still the real salt of the earth, the world's best seasoner and preservative.

Moreover, the branches being secondary and relative to the vine, Jesus, it follows that the believers on earth are capable of doing the work to them entrusted. Theirs is the greatest mission

on earth. They are to preach the Gospel to every creature. They are to oppose and overcome the powers of darkness. The gates of hell are against them. But their power is the power of the vine; all power in heaven and in earth is theirs, for they are secondary and in relation to Jesus, Lord of heaven and earth.

All this being as it is, our text in conclusion again impresses on us the lesson to keep close to Jesus. He is first and fundamental to our Christian life and hope, and our spiritual life is commensurate with our fellowship with Him. Moreover, the Bible being the source of all our spiritual knowledge and faith, it will be well if we again heed Jesus' words when He says: "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me."
