

Christ as Light and Love.

Luke 5.

E. Dennett.

Christian Friend, vol. 7, 1880, p. 309.

The infinite variety and fulness of the word of God is matter for wonder and admiration to every student of the Scripture. It often thus happens that a number of lines of instruction will run through the same passage. This is especially the case in the gospels, in which not only are the moral, the typical, and the dispensational often combined, but the connection and sequence of the incidents recorded have also their significance. It is in illustration of the latter point that we call the attention of the reader to Luke 5.

In the first incident (vv. 1-11), for example, losing sight of the special object of the draught of fish, and the call of Simon Peter to be a fisher of men, Christ is presented to us as the Revealer of sin. He had been teaching the people from Simon's boat; and when He had concluded, He directed Simon to launch out into the deep, and to let down his nets for a draught. (v. 4.) Simon, notwithstanding the fruitless toil of the previous night, obeyed, and at the Lord's word let down the net. The net was instantly filled, so that it could not bear the strain of the multitude of fish; "and they beckoned unto their partners that were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink." (v. 7.) The effect upon Simon Peter is remarkable. The display of the Lord's power so occupied him with himself, that, falling down at Jesus' knees, he said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." (v. 8.)

How, we may enquire, was this effect produced? The exhibition of power, as seen in the miracle of the fish, was the revelation to Peter's soul of the presence of God. He had known and followed Christ ere this; but it was now for the first time that the divine secret flashed into his heart and conscience. Simon was thus brought consciously into the divine presence — face to face with God; and hence, though attracted to Jesus, he is made to feel, sinner as he was, his unworthiness to be with Him; and this feeling found expression in the cry, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." God was revealed to Simon Peter in Christ; and in the holiness of that presence Simon saw his own true state and condition. It was Christ acting as light, and as such He was of necessity the Revealer of sin.

The same effect always follows the manifestation of God to the soul. It is seen in Job, when he said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42: 6) ; also in Isaiah, crying, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." (Isa. 6: 5.) On this account it is that the sinner is never convicted of his sin until the light of God has entered his soul. Has my reader ever been brought face to face with God?

But if Christ is the Revealer of sin, the next two incidents teach that He can take away the sin which He reveals. The first is that of the man "full of leprosy." Leprosy, as often explained, is the type of the evil in the flesh which, breaking out, covers the whole man with defilement and guilt. This poor man comes before us, with his condition openly revealed. The light has done its work, and he is seen, and sees himself, to be full of leprosy. And what is his resource? Surely he has no other than in the One who has brought his sin to light. For if Christ is light — symbol of the holiness of God — He is also love — the expression of the heart of God. If He thus acts as light, when He first comes into contact with the sinner, it is only to pioneer the way for the exhibition of His love. As soon, therefore, as the leper is found on his face, at His feet, crying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," "He put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean." (vv. 12, 13.) And the leper then learnt that the love of Christ was as large as His power; for the leprosy immediately departed from him.

The next incident, that of the man with a palsy (the paralytic) differs from the leper, in the aspect now considered, only in the fact that he represents, not the guilty, but the helpless sinner. He could not come therefore to Christ, but had to be brought, for he was "without strength." But though brought, yea, because of this (for it was "their faith," as will be seen, that secured the blessing) he learns, equally with the leper, the healing, cleansing power of Christ. Taking then the two together, we learn that if Christ reveals the state of the sinner, He is able also to meet his need and condition. Blessed Saviour! thou art equal to all our needs.. There is not a sinner upon the face of the globe, whatever his state or guilt, whose case thou canst not meet. Thy precious blood cleanseth from all sin.

It will not be overlooked, that it is faith which brings the soul into contact with Christ. The degree of faith may differ, but wherever there is faith it produces a response in the heart of the Lord. Thus the faith of the leper was feeble: he believed only in the power of Christ. He confessed that he was not sure as to His heart. He could go no farther than to say, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Still there was faith, and hence the Lord instantly responded to his cry. There was greater energy in the faith of those who brought the man with a palsy "into the midst, before Jesus." They pressed through all difficulties, overcame all obstacles; for "when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the house-top, and let him down through the tiling." (v. 19.) Evidently they had confidence both in the power and heart of Christ. Nor was their confidence misplaced; for no sooner had they succeeded in their object than it is recorded, "And when He saw their faith, He said unto him, 'Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.'" (v. 20.) The need of faith is emphasized indeed by the contrast. For we read, after a description of those (Pharisees and doctors of the law) who were sitting by, that "the power of the Lord was present to heal them." (v. 17.) Why, then, was it that not one of these obtained the blessing? Because they had not faith. How often is this the case now! The gospel is being preached to large numbers, and this gospel is the power of God unto salvation — to whom? To every one that believeth. (Rom. 1: 16.) And yet how frequently not one is saved; for God never saves the sinner apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, during the sojourn of our blessed Lord in this scene, it was faith alone that laid hold of the blessing.

Pursuing, however, the special line of truth through the connection, we learn from the next incident, that, if the Lord meets the need of the sinner, He claims his service when his need is met. "After these things He went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of

custom: and He said unto him, Follow me." (v. 27.) Levi was busily occupied with his daily occupations as Jesus was passing by. But he was not his own. The One who saw him claimed all that he was and had, and expressed this claim in the words, "Follow me." Having shown Himself as the Saviour in the two preceding incidents, He now declares His authority as Lord. And as Lord, His word is supreme, demanding the instant and complete obedience of the soul. This is illustrated in the action of Levi. As soon as the Lord had uttered His command, "he left all, rose up, and followed Him." (v. 28.) This proves that it was not so much the assertion of authority, though He who spake had the right to command, as the expression of the claims of His heart. Nay, it was more; it was the presentation of Himself to the heart of Levi; and by the attractive power of His person He thus drew Levi away from everything by which He was surrounded, and after Himself in the path of discipleship. This is how disciples are ever made. Try as we will, we cannot follow Christ until He has disclosed Himself to, and won, our hearts. Then, and only then, we receive power to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and to follow Him. But we may well challenge our souls — and this point may be especially pressed with all affection upon young believers — as to whether we have acknowledged, and whether we do habitually acknowledge, the claims of Christ over all that we are and have. There are so few disciples in this day of laxity and worldliness! What, then, let us ask, constitutes a disciple? It is not in the profession of Christianity, otherwise all around us were disciples. No; but it lies in the total setting aside of ourselves — our wills — and in the acceptance of the will of Christ, as Lord, for our daily walk and conversation. It is seen in the action of Levi. He refused himself, and everything around him, and with eyes fixed upon the One who had called him, he steadily followed in His steps. It is seen in the statement of the apostle, "I am crucified with Christ" (if so his will is gone): "nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." (Gal. 2: 20.) It is exemplified in a remarkable way in Phil. 3. Again, therefore, we ask, Are we owning the claims of the Saviour as Lord?

It may be remarked, before passing on, that Levi makes Christ "a great feast in his own house; and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them." (v. 29.) The Lord has His joy in the whole-hearted and devoted disciple, and feasts with him, as He does with all His faithful ones; and, moreover, Levi as the true disciple expresses the heart of His Lord to those around him; for he invites to his table not the righteous, but sinners, those whom Jesus came to call. How blessed to be so near the heart of the Lord (and this can never be unless we are closely following Him) that He can use us as the channel of His own mind and heart! The scribes and Pharisees may murmur as they will; but our joy will be undisturbed as long as we are in happy fellowship with the Lord.

In connection with this was the objection that, whereas John's disciples practised fasting, Christ's ate and drank. To this He replied, "Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days." (vv. 33-35.) From this we gather — confining ourselves to the special line we have followed — that the presence of Christ is the only source of joy to His disciples. Having convicted them of sin, taken their sin away, claimed their service, He would have them satisfied in Himself. They cannot fast, therefore, in His presence. It is true that for us, since He has departed, that the fasting and the rejoicing go on together. As passing through a judged scene where Christ is not, we fast; on the other hand, as dwelling in His

presence, as having Himself ever with us, we rejoice; and, in the prospect of being for ever with Him, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. But the lesson abides, and cannot be too deeply engraven on our hearts, that it is the presence of the Lord that constitutes our joy. May we never seek it from any other source.

The chapter then concludes with a parable: "No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old: if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for he saith, the old is better." (vv. 36-39). Grace as displayed in Christ — the pre-eminent characteristic of this gospel — could not be used to patch up the decaying forms of Judaism, nor be contained by them. It was the introduction of a totally new thing, and this was precisely what the scribes and Pharisees could not understand. Nor was it possible for the natural man to comprehend it. The old wine was, and always will be, better to his taste. The Lord therefore teaches in this concluding parable that grace could never flow out from, or be confined in the old legal rites and ceremonies; but that, as it was a wholly new thing, it must be expressed in new ways, and that to contain it new vessels must be created. The connection of this teaching with the line of truth indicated is obvious. We have had Christ as revealing and taking away sin; as claiming the service of those He has forgiven; and then showing that in His presence His disciples could not fast, for it is that which constitutes all their joy. All this was alien to the thoughts of the ceremony-loving and self-righteous Pharisee. He therefore warns them that the introduction of grace was the signal for the passing away of the old dispensation; and that they themselves needed a new life to enter upon the enjoyment of the blessings which He only could bestow. E. D.