

The Servant as Illustrated in John

Revelation 1.

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Part Fourth. LATER MINISTRY.

We get here the servant as illustrated in John. It is remarkable how complete are the writings of each apostle, each saying all he has to say on his own peculiar subject. So the Revelation forms the complement to the gospel and epistles of John. Eternal life is his subject, and to complete it he must needs show how the power of Christ will set all in order down here. In the gospel we get life in Christ, Christ the life-giver; in the epistles life flowing from a risen Christ through the believer; and in Revelation how He will displace all that is not subject to God in heaven and on earth. In the gospel John's service is that of one chosen, and called, and set apart to write of the Son of the Father as the communicator of divine life. He could not exhaust what he had to say of his divine Master. The gospels give the character of Christ, and are of eternal value; and when the Church is gone they will be as valuable still to the earthly people. Not so the epistles, which are more directly the portion of the Church.

There is a difference in the introductions of the three, and in the place in which the Lord is presented. In the gospel of John we get the blessed Lord presented in person on the earth. In his epistles He has left the earth, and gone into heaven as the Rock of ages in whom all blessing is found. Revelation fills up the gap to the end. It is here God's delight in His servant Jesus Christ shining down over the path of His servants in their sorrow.

In the beginning WAS the Word; before creation *He was*. And *who* was that Word? God. Where? With God. To English ears "Word" does not convey the full idea. The Son of God was the One through whom everything expressed by God came forth. But the Greek means more; viz., that which is in the mind, the nucleus of intelligence which produced the word, as well as its expression. That blessed One is seen throughout the gospel on earth, and John His servant traces out those parts of His glory necessary to explain His position as Son of God there. The sweetness of the gospel is in our getting there so much of the Father's love. Turn to the epistles to see the smitten Rock giving forth its living waters to a people down here. They open with fellowship with the Father and with the Son, which could not be understood, save as He is risen and ascended, and sat down at God's right hand, and that we have received the Spirit of adoption. The epistles deal with the application of divine life as seen in the soul of the believer.

Revelation gives quite a different line of truth. It is not enough, that hearts of individuals should be moved with wonder at the person of the Lord Jesus Christ seen on earth, or should understand what they have in Christ so as to have fellowship with the Father and the Son. But here on the earth, with girded loins, the servant must know the fellowship of the sufferings of His Son. Here is John thrown out of all service and association with Christians, alone in Patmos, apart from all that had been a comfort to him. Here is John cut off from all he might take sweet counsel with, yet everything is stamped with the character of service. No Patmos for John, no Revelation for us. We are accustomed to measure service by what we call fruits, and we connect fruit with what can be seen. John's service was not such; it was simply doing what God had given him to do. So with my character as a servant of God.

Am I a servant? Can my Master make a mistake? Have I committed faults? and cannot my Master set them right? Keep up the place of obeying God under all circumstances, knowing that while serving Him, everything, even failure, shall work together for good. I can speak with divine certainty, if you are an obedient servant, that you are where God has put you. All must go right because your Master is there. But I have failed. I say to Him, "Master, I have failed, and must leave all things to Thee." Confess all to God, leave all in His hand, and serve Him still.

"I John who am your brother," etc. — leave out the "also," it spoils the sense, for he is taking the low place of being, not an apostle raised above others, but "your brother," one of many. Tribulation is with the believer an after-fruit, and a blessing. A glorified Christ is given him for his joy and privilege first, and he is introduced into the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, whether waiting down here or waiting with Him there. There is something sweet in the thought that it is the patience of Jesus Christ. It is from want of remembering this that trouble is so like a galling fetter. When the yoke is laid on the shoulder, we do not say it is the yoke of Christ, and the patience of the Lord Jesus Christ. The testimony of Jesus Christ, too, is worth speaking of everywhere, and it is a precious thing to us. If there were a bolder testimony by the children of God, even an individual one to the Lord as the Head of all power, the humble Christian would meet much more of the mockery of the world than he does. It would be saying that you have no right to think yourself your own, everything has been given by God to His Christ, though Satan may have usurped it. It was this which emphatically roused the hatred of the Jews against Christ — "Art *thou* the King of the Jews?"

Is it not worth leaving all for Him? The men of the world would say, "The Princess Alexandra may well leave her home and her country to be wedded to the heir-apparent of England, though his position is only one of hope." We must make up our minds to trouble and patience where the Lord Jesus Christ was rejected. It is a solemn thought, as standing on earth, that He who has sat down in heaven, in whom all the fulness of spiritual blessings in heavenly places is made our own, that He has to claim both the earth and the heavenlies, which are now under the power of darkness; that we are standing on the earth where He was rejected, to be servants according to the thoughts of God, holding forth the word of life, loins girded, patient in tribulation, and quietly waiting.

God ever acts out certain things in certain persons to help our faith and understanding; and they become the type and example of all who are to follow after in the same place. Thus Stephen was taught, amid the storm of stones falling on him, that there is a Son of man in heaven, who had a heart for him and for the people down here who follow Him. See also Saul: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *Me*?" Here is shown out that the Lord Jesus reckons Himself one with His people on earth.

In Rev. 1 we do not get the Lord showing Himself in connection with the work. John was in it; he got into deep trial as a servant, and the Lord came to show him His interest.

Verse 10: "I became in the Spirit on the Lord's-day," the same word as that used in connection with the Lord's supper. He was in ecstasy on the Lord's-day. The voice of the trumpet announces the dignity of the Person who was about to speak to His servant. The text of this book is very different from that of other parts of the Bible. At the time of the Reformation no copy in the original was to be found, and the translation was made from the Latin. Only recently has a trustworthy Greek copy been discovered. Satan did not like this book; for there is none which treats so of his overthrow. Hence he kept it back as long as possible. Sometimes therefore the sense is marred by words put in. Leave out, in verse 11, "first and the last." In this book God has told me of things to come, sending a stream of light right on to the end, showing that what God is in shall triumph, though now trampled on, and that whatever God is not in shall come to nought. Nothing makes a man so thoroughly a pilgrim and a

stranger as the light of God upon his circumstances, and the place where he stands. No book opens up God's thoughts about things on earth like this. The sort of inspiration of it was different too. In other parts, "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;" with John here the message was given him by the Lord. The source whence the knowledge flowed was God Himself, and from Him. like "thus saith the Lord," we get the light which shines out all round about us. And nothing like having His thoughts can keep His people from evil.

"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." There are two classes of hearers. By the seven times repeated word, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," I am justified in applying the Revelation to any one of you. However weak and feeble a person may be, if he be full of the word of God he will be a messenger from God to man; he will become the vessel in which the divine wisdom and power are revealed. There is something remarkable in the Lord holding so central a position "in the midst of the lamps." Did you ever compare the dress-habiliments of the Lord with those of the high priest, either as in the Old Testament, or as referred to in Hebrews? Compare, first, these two together, and then both with what is said here of Christ as the Visitor of the churches. It is not the dress of a person with much work to do, or of one going to offer a sacrifice, or of one about to run a race. Flowing robes would not suit these. The position of the girdle also is not one for strength, as if about the loins. *Golden girdle* — gold points to what is strictly divine in the tabernacle. Then comes the same glory as that of the Ancient of days in Daniel — "His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow." When light is perfectly free from earthly mixture it is white, the smallest earthy particle in a flame colours it. White robes in those who are brought near to the Lord show that there is nothing earthy left. The One through whom God gives His word is clothed in essential purity. "His eyes were as a flame of fire." There is the light again; those eyes can read everything. When they look down into your heart, and on your work, every motive starts out into prominence. "His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace" — essentially pure passing through all. "His voice as the sound of many waters." Nothing has a more absorbing power than that of much water falling; it can be heard in the stillness of the night miles and miles away. A soothing sound, but one that carries with it the idea of irresistibility. "In His right hand seven stars." He holds the testimony. Why must there be testimony? Why should I not pass my time merely enjoying His beauties? Had He lighted those stars only for the pleasure of His people here, or for God? All testimony is in connection with God His Father. "Out of his mouth a two-edged sword" — the power of that was used against Satan so as to throw him back in each attack. "His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." Nothing more expressive of majesty and glory, and there is nothing sweeter than the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

People are not generally prepared for Christ searching through all they have done. If you knew grace and mercy in the person of Christ, you would be so full of what He has done, that you would not think about yourself. Wherever there is a shrinking from the light of Christ playing upon everything within us, there is a want of knowing what He is. If all has been judged, why wish to hide even a little bit? Lost, and saved by Christ, let Him speak and say of me what He likes. I am satisfied to leave myself in His hands. Oh, how the low, vile feeling of mistrust creeps up about us! Saints are not accustomed to have the candle of the Lord brought right into all the circumstances and necessities of their lives. See the effect of it here on John. There, where the weakness of the disciple becomes most painful, there the heights and depths of the grace of the Lord shine out most brilliantly. John fell at His feet as dead. I should not be sorry to see more of that sort of feeling in saints. It was not strength, but it was a blessed thing so to have the glory of the Lord brought right into the conscience, even to the overwhelming of the poor earthen vessel. "He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not"

— as in the transfiguration.

Am I a servant? and God has sent to see how my service is going on. What answer have I? What is the answer? If I am made a light-bearer, I am under the hand of Him who understands the glory of God. *He* cares for the lamps who lighted them. Did you seek the Lord before He sought you? Nay; before the foundation of the world He had chosen you; and as to any service, who put it into your hand? The self-same Master, and chief Servant of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. He lighted the lamps that God might have a light in the dark world. And we shall not have the happy liberty of children if there be not a spirit of service in us. Oh, let in the light into your souls! Cultivate the inshining of that light of the perfect Servant of God, who, if He has given you light at all, has done it in connection with the testimony. He says, "I have set you in a place of light where you cannot walk independently of Me." But where is the fruit of the testimony? At the time of the Reformation, Christians lost the sense of responsibility to the light; they thought of the amazing blessing they had got, and not of the manifestation of the life. It is an individual thing, however, and we must not judge each other according to our own light. So the path before you, that path which Christ has traced out, and for which He has given you light to act. Let the light into your souls: it comes in grace from Christ, but you will have no strength as it shines in, unless you connect it, as here, with the person of Christ, "the First and the Last" — that magnificent glory of His own so suited to the drooping condition of His servant. For myself I can have nothing to say for what my walk has been. I thank God for His patience and grace, and earnestly look to Him for the time that remains, that He may brighten up my own soul in the understanding of the desire of the Holder of the stars that we should bear fruit; and knowing this, that the purpose of our hearts may be right.

A question often arises about usefulness. Satan often beguiles by it. He may have suggested to John that he would be more useful if he were to compromise a little, and keep out of trouble for the sake of being free for his service to saints. Useful to whom? To God or to men? God may be able to show out more of His glory by laying men aside. The eyes of God rested on Paul a prisoner, seemingly useless (not even always allowed to write), as the field for the display of some of the greatest privileges of truth. The very point when your weakness seems to make you useless is often the very way in which God shows forth His glory. People think it strange that old Christians, useless ones, etc. etc., should be left, and young active ones taken. Do not you be trying to settle God's house for Him; do not say, "What a pity for John to get to Patmos." The Lord wanted him there to communicate something that might serve His people to the end of time. A person may be in difficult circumstances, and you may have it in your power to get him out of them in the power of human nature. And you may do it, and find out that God would have had him in them, because then he could have borne testimony; and you ought not to have measured things by your love for him and your comfort, but by the light of God. We often act on a set of thoughts of which the cord is bound to our own humanity instead of God's glory.