

The Knowledge of Christ

A Letter Written By The Late J.A.T.

(from "An Outline of Sound Words" No. 24, p. 14)

Every now and then the truth prevails to draw out of the varied evils of the sects, in face of trial, those who finding refreshment in Christ begin to prize Him now not for what He gives alone but for what He is in Himself. And it is far better and brighter to be attracted out by the excellency of the knowledge of Christ to Himself, than merely to be driven out as many now by consciences become restless by the discovery of evil, for in this last case there is nothing to sustain us when out, or to lead one on and guide in the intricate path.

Have you ever observed the order in 1 Peter 2? How quickly the new born babes are drawn on from the first taste of the graciousness of the Lord displayed in all His conferred blessing to their occupations with Himself according to the twofold order of the priesthood. In verse 5 we have, after the character of Aaron, a sacrificing "holy priesthood," only not now offering up sacrifices for sins, but spiritual songs of praise (Heb. 13, 15) to God and acceptable to Him by Jesus Christ. With boldness by the blood they have found their way into the holiest of all, without a cloud upon the brightness of God's presence, there to feed with God upon the fat and excellency of the work of Christ, not only in its results for them, but of best and brightest glory for God. Praise to God — worship — is the necessary outflow of hearts surcharged with Christ in such communion with God.

Entering with God into His rest and delight in the work of Christ, they are in a fair way to learn about His Person — Himself; and the next verse gives us this. He is "precious" to God, and as our hearts awake to this He becomes therefore "the preciousness" (as the word is) to us, or the sum and substance of all that is precious to us: as Paul who, when he began to learn and know Christ, was willing to suffer the loss of all things for such a One, nay has done so, and looks back on what he has lost to heap shame and contempt upon all. But all this is learnt in the presence of God and in communion — the spring of that worship the Father seeks — and belongs to the "holy priesthood" in this first aspect of it.

Now we come to the second — our "Royal priesthood" and the character and exercise of it. This is priesthood after the character of Melchizedek — as the other was after the character of Aaron, and both are found in Hebrews as you well know, with all that is typical in them applied to Christ, as here to us. And I daresay you have learned to distinguish that while Christ is Priest after the order of Melchizedek, yet that the time for His exercise of His priesthood as such is not yet, but is Aaronic in character, as in Heb. 9 and 10, and Lev. 9. 22-23 will be the exercise of the Melchizedekian priesthood when as King-Priest He comes out to bless the people — in their place without, waiting for Him: — and the glory is displayed: so in Zech. 6. 13: only of course both types fail as all types must when we turn to the reality, and comparisons become contrasts. We go in with our Aaron there to commune with God about the perfection of the offering, which is far beyond knowing that our sins are borne away by the scapegoat, as the people outside will when He comes out. But then it will be to display the glory of the Most High God possessor of heaven and earth, in Himself victorious over all the kings, and Heir of all the promises — see Gen. 14 and Heb. 7. 1, 2.

So much then for the order; and character of the Royal priesthood; it is one of display before the world, and it is the glory of Christ that is displayed: but how in any sense can this apply to us now? Oh how precious is verse 9 of our chapter; having learnt Christ in the communion of the sanctuary with God,

we are now to go out and display Him in our walk and testimony in the world — showing forth the virtues (margin) of Him Who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. What occupations with God! and Christ the source and centre and power of all. I hope my sketch has not been too scanty to lead you into my train, if it is new to you; it has been very sweet to me.

John has been very much before us as well this last month, — one thing I would like to give you, that is the difference in the aspect of the Spirit's indwelling as given in John 4 and John 7, and it is not without connection with our gleanings from Peter.

In John 3 we get light shining in the testimony of Christ that discloses nature to be such in its best and most religious condition that a Nicodemus must be born again to see or enter into the kingdom of God — but if the light thus discloses man's condition, it reveals the heart of God to man in that very condition (John 3: 16). For Jesus if He knew all men, and more, what is in man (John 2: 24, 25) — knows God (John 3: 12, 13). As Son of Man before Nicodemus' eyes, He is in heaven, God, and everywhere. But look, if man is to be brought out of his old condition by new birth into a wholly new one — it cannot be by slurring over that old condition, nor by anything short of its judgment — hence the force of "must" in verse 14 and "so " — the Son of Man must not only be lifted up as the serpent — now the serpent was the brazen effigy of what was working death among the people — and ah! behold Him Who knew no sin made that cursed thing sin, that by its judgment under the hand of God upon Him, "whosoever, etc." But the cross was not only the judgment of sin on the Son of Man, but in verse 16 it was the revelation of the heart of God in the Person and work of the Son of God; and does not this go infinitely beyond the mere judgment of sin? Oh! what depths of love are here disclosed in that word "so"! And this is all the subject matter of the Word, which by the operation of the Spirit on the natural man is the instrumentality of the new birth in which — born of the life of God and made partaker of the nature of Him of Whom I am begotten I am "clean every whit" in the sight of God (hence the use of the symbolic "water," including as it does not only the instrument but the effect).

Nicodemus ought to have known much of this from the prophets. But now in John 4 we get a wholly new thing — a divine gift by Jesus, ("I will give") living water to form a well within, ever springing up into everlasting life — so that there shall be not more thirst. This is the Holy Ghost given to dwell in the regenerate one, to be the power and energy of life in communion with God its source and end. Here then is a source of joy apart from and independent of all circumstances — of joy the deepest and eternal, and a source that never fails though at times the joy may be clouded over here below; it is the knowledge of all that eternal life is that we have got, made known to us by the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, Who is at the same time the power of communion in it, with God its source and level. Could there be any joy beyond this in heaven-itself? Now the Holy Ghost is given to be the power of it below, and the spring of it all is thus in every individual believer.

In the latter part of chapter 4 God receives the overflow in the grateful worship of those whose life being in the Son know Him as Father, and have fellowship with Him in the consciousness of this relationship.

In John 7 the Holy Ghost is given consequent upon the Man Jesus being glorified at God's right hand, and our union with Him there, and He is given as the witness of all the glory of Jesus' place there — of sin purged away therefore, righteously accomplished, and peace made — of all the glory of Him Who is there and of all that He is heir to: and all this the Holy Ghost reveals to us as those who share in it all by virtue of union with Him — not as using us as channels merely, unintelligent of all that was passing through to others, as in Old Testament times (1 Peter 1), but as giving us the consciousness that all is our own in Him — and in this lies the force of "out of his belly" shall flow — a well known symbol of

the heart and affections and deepest emotions. So then thus filled by the Spirit's sweet revelations to us of. Jesus in the glory — streams are how gushing out from us and through us to the dry and thirsty ground around. In the desert a rock with its stream followed Israel for their blessing, and that rock was Christ — but here is Christ — revealed in our souls by the Holy Ghost's power that out of the fulness of our joy, even in the desert, flows blessing to the desert, or wherever there is a thirsty heart in it.

And now put all together, and do not these two in John give us most blessedly the power of all that we had in Peter? God the Holy Ghost dwelling in the believer the power of communion with God and of testimony to the world. And in John 7 this is the very thing that Jesus substitutes for us for the millennial joy of which the feast of tabernacles was the shadow.

A well of living water springs
In worship up to God:
A river outward flowing brings
To men the living word.