

The Characters of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels.

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Section 5 of: **The Evangelists.**

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A meditation on the Lord Jesus Christ, in His varied characters in the four Gospels.

I have now passed the time of my meditations on the four Evangelists, noticing the different service committed to each of them by the Spirit of God, in presenting to us the Lord Jesus. The ease with which they fulfil their task bespeaks the inspiration under which they wrote, and the consciousness they had of the truth of all they were recording. It is like the ease with which He about Whom they wrote did His works and delivered His lessons, and which ease, in like manner, bespoke the presence of that divine light and power that filled Him. But whether we consider the Son Who was the Actor in all these blessed scenes, or the Spirit Who is the Recorder of them, our souls may well be sure of this, that God has brought Himself very near to us.

The Lord Jesus has been variously before us in these Gospels. We see Him God and man in one Person, and yet without confusion of the natures, One in eternal glory with the Father and the Holy Ghost, and yet, as truly, the Son of Mary, born of a woman, His body formed in the virgin's womb. We see Him the Son in the bosom of the Father; the Word become flesh declaring God; the Son of God, the Christ, the Son of man, the Son of David, Jesus of Nazareth, the Servant, the sent One, the sanctified One, the given One, the sealed One, the Lamb; and then the risen, the ascended, the glorified One. In such titles and characters we read of Him.

Variouly also in conditions and circumstances is He seen by us. Very chequered, surely, was His daily life. He was always a Stranger, a solitary One; and yet none so accessible. He was in continual collision with the rulers; teaching the people; counselling, warning, enlightening the disciples that followed Him; in nearer fellowship with the Twelve; or dealing still more closely and livingly with individual souls. He knew the tempers of Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians, and had words in season for each. All manner of persons He had to answer, all manner of diseases to heal, all kinds of need and infirmity to relieve; cases of all sorts made demands on Him continually, and, as we say, unexpectedly. His whole life was ever holding out an invitation to the burdened, afflicted world around Him. In these different connections we see the Lord.

At times, likewise, He is scorned and slighted, watched and hated; retiring, as if to save His life from the attempts of the enemy.

At times He is weak, followed only by the poorest of the people; wearied and hungry, ministered to by some loving women who knew themselves to be His debtors.

At times He is, in all gentleness, compassionating the multitudes, or companying with His disciples.

At times He is in strength, doing wonders, or letting out some rays of glory; the realms of death, and the powers of unseen worlds, being subject to Him.

Thus and thus is He again before us, as we read the Evangelists. "He that descended is the same

also that ascended," surely we may say, in this sense. He will ask for a cup of water at the hand of a stranger, because He is weary with His journey, though He will turn water into wine for the use of others. He will ask the loan of a boat from a fisherman when the people press on Him, and throng Him. He will pass on as a traveller, that would go further, and not enter, unbidden, the dwelling of others. And yet, when occasions demanded it, He would claim a beast from the *owner* of it, as having the title of the *Lord* over it; or let it be known that the right hand of power in the highest was His seat, and the clouds His chariot.

The world would not contain the books that would be written, if all were told; but what is told is told for our blessing, that we may know Him, and live by that knowledge, and love Him, and trust Him.

His glories are threefold: personal, official, and moral. His personal glory He veiled, save when faith discovered it, or an occasion demanded it. His official glory He veiled likewise. He did not walk through the land as either the divine Son in the bosom of the Father, or as the authoritative Son of David. Such glories were commonly hid as He passed on through the circumstances of life day by day. But His moral glory could not be hid. He could not be less than perfect as He acted, or as He was seen and heard. Moral glory belonged to Him — it was Himself. From its intense excellency it was too bright for the eye of man, and man was under constant exposure and rebuke from it - but there it shone, whether man could bear it or not. It now illuminates every page of the four Evangelists, as it once illuminated every path which He Himself trod on this earth of ours.

But beside this moral glory which ever shone in Him, we see Him going from glory to glory along the whole way from the womb to the heavens. Our evangelists enable us thus to track Him

At His birth He comes forth in the glory of untainted humanity. He was born of a woman, born in the world. He was, however, "that Holy Thing." And thus, in His person, the full glory of the nature which He had assumed is seen.

During His childhood and youth, and the whole term of His subjection to His parents at Nazareth, it was the glory of the law that He was reflecting. Perfect under Moses, He grew in favour with God and man. Moses, in his day, bore on his face the glory of the law; but he bore it only officially or representatively. 2 Cor. 2: 7. He could not reflect it essentially or personally, for he was not himself keeping it. He could not do that. Like the feeblest in the camp, he quaked as he heard it. But Jesus kept it, and thus, personally or essentially, bore the reflection of it. Of course, I mean in spirit. He was the living type of the perfection which the law demanded.

In due time, however, He has to leave the solitudes of Nazareth. He is baptized; taking the new place to which the voice of God had called Israel. He was thus fulfilling *all* righteousness; that demanded by one call of God, as well as that demanded by another.

Here, however, we may stand for a moment, and notice something peculiar. He passed away *at once* from under John. His baptism was rather *accompanied* than *succeeded* by His anointing by His ordination (as we may call it), His commission from the Father, and endowment by the Holy Ghost; for we read, "And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up *straightway* out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."

This is peculiar. Jesus was not kept one moment under John's baptism. He could not stay there. No fruit of repentance could be looked for from One Who had been already perfect under the law. He *went* under this baptism because He would fulfil all righteousness; He was not *kept* under it, because no fruit of it, no "fruits meet for repentance, could be demanded of Him. As He came up out of the water

the heavens opened upon Him, the Spirit descended, and the voice said, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." This was His glory, as I may say, under *John* - peculiar indeed, and perfect in its generation.

Then, as anointed and commissioned, Jesus comes forth into action. It is no longer Nazareth merely, but the whole land. And He comes forth to manifest the divine character. The perfectly obedient One still, honouring the law in every jot and tittle, His business now is to manifest the Father and divine goodness, amid the miseries and need of a self-ruined world. The glory of the *Image of the Father* now shone in Him, in the ministry He had come forth to fulfil.

It was not merely as perfect under the law that He showed Himself to the world. He kept the law Himself, but He did not bring it forth to others. Had He done that, He would have been a lawgiver, as Moses had been. But, while the law was given by Moses, it was "grace and truth" that came by Jesus Christ. In retirement at Nazareth, He bore on Him the glory of the law; abroad, amid the ruins of man, He bore the glory of the Father, displaying the divine character in the behalf of need and wretchedness, though still the obedient One, and as perfect under the law as before. But he that saw Him saw Him that sent Him. Such was the living, active, ministering Jesus.

As the dead, risen, and ascended Jesus we next see Him. By His death, all that could maintain God's righteousness, while He was making the sinner righteous, or justifying him, was itself maintained. The cross reflects the assembled glories of mercy and truth, of righteousness and peace. Glory to God, peace to sinners, is the language of it. Full moral glory shines there, while God is accepting and pardoning the vilest. The veil of the temple was rent by it, and so were the graves of the saints. It is but just for God (fruit too, I know, of boundless, eternal riches of grace) to justify the sinner that pleads the cross. And thus, the glory of *God* now shines in the face of Him that was dead and is alive again, in the face of the Crucified seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens.

Surely, I may therefore say, it is as from glory to glory that we see the Lord going all the way, the wondrous, various way, from the womb to the heavens. The glory of *human nature* shone in His person as He was born of the virgin; the glory of the *law* shone in His behaviour and ways as He grew up and lived for thirty years in solitude, or in subjection to His parents at Nazareth; the glory of the *Fulfiller of all righteousness* shone in His momentary passage through John's baptism; the glory of *the Father* shone in His ministry through the cities and villages of Israel; and the glory of *God* now shines in "the face of Jesus Christ," risen, and ascended, and seated in the heavens, after His crucifixion and death.

And tracing thus His glories from the womb to the heavens, I may remember what another has said upon His ascension. "In the translation of Elijah the lineaments of the ascension of Christ appear, the ascension of Him Who, not rapt in a chariot of fire, nor needing the cleansing of that fiery baptism, nor requiring a commissioned chariot to bear Him up, did, in the far sublimer calmness of His own indwelling power, rise from the earth, and, with His human body, pass into the heavenly places."* Very true and beautiful.

* Trench's Hulsean Lectures.

But beside this, the evangelists give us samples of the glories which await Him in the coming day of His power. The transfiguration, the entry into Jerusalem, and the desire of the Greeks at the feast show us "the kingdom" in certain departments of it. For these several occasions set His glories before us for a moment. The heavens and the earth, the places round the throne on high, Israel and their Jerusalem, with all the Gentiles from the four winds. of heaven, are here seen entertaining Him suitably, according to their different estate and capacity.

At the transfiguration we see Him accepted in the heavenly places, receiving there those honours which such places in their highest department well knew were His, and such honours as those places alone could confer on Him. He is here glorified with the glory of the celestial. His garments, too, are baptized in the heavenly light. The personages that belong to those realms come forth to attend Him. Moses is on one side, and Elias on the other; but Jesus, as the sun, is in the centre or fountain of the glory which then enshrined them all.

This was His completeness and honour in heaven. He was personally glorified there, and His train filled the temple.

At the entry into Jerusalem, we see Him accepted in Israel, receiving, in like manner, such honours as Israel could confer on Him. The owner of the ass acknowledges His higher claim as Lord. The multitude, it is true, cannot baptize His garments in glory, as the heavens afore had done, but they can spread their own garments under His feet, and surround Him with the joys of a feast of tabernacles. There are no glorified ones to wait on Him, to come forth from their homes of glory to greet and honour Him; but His citizens will hail Him as their King.

And the Greeks, representatives of the nations, are ready to wait at the feast, to wait on Him as the Lord of the feast — as Zechariah both anticipates and requires. Zech. 8: 20-23; Zech. 14: 17. The Lord refused this at that time, it is true. John 12. His hour had not come. He would for the present be the *Seed under the ground*, rather than the *Sheaf in the day of harvest*. All that is so; but still, the Greeks were ready in their place, as the heavens were ready in the day of the Son of David.

But all these were but for a moment. We know that, in spite of this passing exultation of the multitude, they and their rulers quickly denied Him; yea, and the enmity of the nations is shown us at the cross, in company with the unbelief of Israel. Still, His glories did thus shine across these spots and these occasions, that we might gather them up as pledge-fragments or earnest of what awaits Him in the day when heaven and earth and the whole creation of God in their several ways shall tell of Him, and own His presence in a world worthy of Him. And what a hope it is, had we but hearts for Him, to see Him in a world that will be worthy of Him.

But we do not know these glories as we ought, and to which the pages of the Evangelists introduce us. Above all, we do not use this Image of God with that simple faith which it claims. We have our own thoughts about God; and they prove, more or less, to be the loss and sorrow of our souls. But the apostle could tell us the value of this Image. He could testify how this glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ rises on the heart; as, of old, the word which commanded light to shine out of darkness rose on the creation. 2 Cor. 4: 6. And we should charge our hearts no longer to take up with their own religious thoughts and devotions, but to be occupied with this Image of God, and find our object and our rest in it.

What is the Holy Ghost's work in the apostles whether speaking to sinners by preaching, or teaching saints by epistles, but unfolding the Jesus Whom the evangelists have, under Him, already given to us? Surely Jesus is every thing. "Christ is all." And by different persuasives and reasonings we are challenged to make every thing of Him. Nothing is left for our own speculations — absolutely nothing.

We have God Himself revealed in our own nature, in our own world, in our own circumstances. Well might kings and prophets have longed for such a privilege. But they had it not. It is ours, and it is beyond all price. We are not left to gather our knowledge of God from description; we see and hear and learn for ourselves, through personal manifestation, Who and what He is. We sit before His Image, His Likeness, in the Lord Jesus. The gospel is "the gospel of Christ, Who is the Image of God." Scripture,

as I may speak, lets God show Himself by His acts, and does not take the method of describing Him. He has not committed the revelation of Himself to the pen of even inspired description. He has graciously chosen to be His own Revealer, in personal, living action, by His own sayings and doings — that simplest and surest way of making Himself known, the way in which the wayfaring man may not err, and in which the child need not mistake his lesson.

And, in accordance with this, we see the Lord, during His life, in constant activity. For there is deep meaning in that activity. He was by it ever pressing God or the Father upon the notice of sinners; and this constant diligence in doing and in speaking tells us that He would have us learn *much* of God. It seems to tell us that we are to acquaint ourselves *largely* with Him; in all that, at least, in which such knowledge is good and sweet and profitable, suited to us in our necessities and for our blessing.

It is not by treatises or discourses, but by personal activities in our own ordinary circumstances, that we learn Him; and, therefore, the simpler we are, the more like children (who learn their lesson rather than discuss it) we carry ourselves, the more surely shall we find Him, and reach Him, and know Him.

The divine nature was found in His person, the divine character in His life. And this gives us an interest in every passage of His life, however small and occasional or ordinary it may be. For he who traces the life and death of Jesus reads God, or the characteristics of the divine moral glory.

And I ask, beloved, Did this image, this glory, as it shone in the face of Jesus, alarm? Had sinners to treat it as Israel treated the glory which shone in the face of Moses? Did the poor, convicted one need that the Lord should put a veil on His face, as Aaron and the children of Israel required Moses to do? The Samaritan was convicted as deeply and as thoroughly as ever Sinai would have convicted her. Jesus had *all* the secrets of her conscience out. But did she withdraw herself? The sinner in the temple is before Jesus as one whom the law would have stoned. But does she hide herself? Does she find that light oppressive or overpowering, which was then filling the place, and which had emptied it of her accusers?

And I ask again, Did disciples, who walked with Him every day, tremble before Him? Did they wish Him away, as though they felt His presence too much for them? Nothing of this, They had sorrow when He talked of leaving them; and when they had indeed lost Him, as they judged, they were found by the angels weeping. They never walked with Him as though they wished a veil had been on His face. And His rebukes made no difference. To their spirits such rebukes, though they were sharp at times, were never the thunders of Mount Sinai. They felt the holiness of His presence, and were ashamed to let out the secret of their heart; but they never desired His absence. What privilege! what consolation!

We can well understand the greater ease with which we could receive a person of distinction at our house, than go and visit him at his. But a visit *from* him would be the surest way of preparing us to pay a visit to him, and see him in those conditions and circumstances which are properly his, and superior to ours. And after this manner is it between the Lord and us. Who can tell it in its blessedness! He has been here, in the midst of our circumstances, as the Son of man Who came eating and drinking, showing Himself in the gracious freedom of one that would gain our confidence. He walked and talked with us as a man would with his friend. He knew us face to face. He was in our house. And, after He rose, He returned to us, if not to our house, to our world — for the resurrection-scenes were all laid here. He was then on His way to His own place; but again He tarried in ours, that the links between us might be strengthened. For then, after He had risen, He was the same to us as He had been before. Change of condition had no effect upon Him — blessed to tell it. Kindred instances of grace and

character, before He suffered and after He rose, show us this abundantly. Late events had put the Lord and His disciples at a greater distance than companions had ever known. They had betrayed their unfaithful hearts, forsaking Him, and fleeing in the hour of His weakness and danger; while He, for their sake, had gone through death, tasting the judgment of God upon sin. And they were still poor Galileans, and He was glorified with all power in heaven and on earth. But all this wrought no change in Him. "Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature," as an apostle says, could do that. He returns to them the very Jesus they had known before. He showed them His hands and His side, that they might know that it was He Himself. Yea, we may add, He showed them His heart, and His thoughts, and His ways; His sympathies, and considerateness, and all His affections; that in another sense they might know that it was He Himself.

I would not stop to offer the evidence of this from the Evangelists; it so abounds, addressing us on every occasion in which we see the Lord in resurrection, if we do but duly heed it. But if I might for a moment pass the bounds of the Evangelists, and look at the ascended Jesus in the Book of Acts, there we find the same identity. Jesus here in ministry, Jesus in resurrection, Jesus in heaven, is the same Jesus. For from the heavens He seems to delight in knowing Himself by the name that He had acquired among us and for us, the name which makes Him ours by the bond of a common nature, and by the bond of accomplished grace and salvation. "I am Jesus," was His answer as from the highest place in heaven, when Saul, on the road to Damascus, demanded of Him, "Who art Thou, Lord?"

What shall we say, beloved, of the condescendings, the faithfulness, the greatness, the simplicity, the glory and the grace together, that form and mark His path before us! We know what He is this moment, and what He will be for ever from what He has already been, as we see Him in the four Gospels. And we may pass into His world in all ease and naturalness, when we think of this.

"There no stranger-God shall meet thee,
Stranger thou in courts above."

He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever," in His own proper glory. With Him "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning," according to His essential, divine nature. But so in His knowledge of us, His relationship to us, His affections for us, and His way with us.

After He had risen, and was returned to His disciples, He never once reminded them of their late desertion of Him. This tells us of Him. "I know no one," says another, "so kind, so condescending who is come down to poor sinners, as He. I trust His love more than I do any saint; not merely His power as God, but the tenderness of His heart as man. None ever showed such, or had such, or proved it so well. None have inspired me with such confidence. Let others go to saints or angels if they will, I trust Jesus more."

But this is but one ray of the moral glory that shone in Him. What a sight it is to see, if we could but look at it in its full measure! Who could have *conceived* such an object? It must have been exhibited ere it could have been described. But such was Jesus, Who once walked here in the unclouded fulness of that glory, and Whose reflections have been left by the Holy Ghost on the sacred pages of the Evangelists.

What attractiveness there must have been in Him for the eye and the heart that had been opened by the Spirit! This is witnessed to us in the apostles. Doctrinally they knew but little about Him, and as to their worldly interests, they gained nothing by remaining with Him. And yet they clung to Him. It cannot be said that they availed themselves of His power to work miracles. Indeed, they rather questioned it than used it. And we have reason to judge that, ordinarily, He would not have exercised

that power for them. And yet there they were with Him; and for His sake had left their place and kindred on the earth.

What influence His *person* must have had with souls drawn of the Father!

And this influence, this attractiveness, were alike felt by men of very opposite temperaments. The slow-hearted, reasoning Thomas, and the ardent, uncalculating Peter, were together kept near and around Him.

May we not healthfully dwell on these samples of His nearness to us, and of His preciousness to hearts like our own; and accept them, too, as pledges of what remains for us all, when, gathered out of every clime, redeemed ones of every colour, character, and phase of the human family, we shall be with Him for ever?

We need to know Him *personally* better than we do. It was this knowledge that the apostles, in those days of the Gospels, had of Him — it was the force and authority of such knowledge that their souls felt. And we need more of it. We may be busy in acquainting ourselves with truths about Him, and we may make proficiency that way; but with all our knowledge, and all the disciples' ignorance, they may leave us far behind in the power of a commanding affection toward Himself. And I will not refuse to say, that it is well when the heart is drawn by Him beyond the knowledge that we have of Him (I mean knowledge in a doctrinal form) may account for. There are simple souls that exhibit this; but, generally, it is otherwise.

"The prerogative of our Christian faith," says one (and his words are good and reasonable), "the secret of its strength is this — that all which it has, and all which it offers, is laid up in a *Person*. This is what has made it strong, while so much else has proved weak. It has not merely deliverance, but a Deliverer; not redemption only, but a Redeemer as well. This is what makes it sunlight, and all else, when compared with it, as moonlight; fair it may be, but cold and ineffectual; while here the life and the light are one. And oh, how great the difference between submitting ourselves to a complex of rules, and casting ourselves upon a beating heart; between accepting a system, and cleaving to a person! Our blessedness (and let us not miss it) is this — that our treasures are treasured in a *Person*, Who is not, for one generation, a present Teacher and a living Lord, and then for all succeeding generations a past and a dead One, but Who is present and living for all."

Yes, indeed — and this ever present and living One in the Gospels, is constantly Himself either seen or heard. He is the Teacher or the Doer on every occasion. and the evangelists have little or nothing left for them in the way of explanation or comment. And this gives to their narratives simplicity and palpable truthfulness, a truthfulness that may be felt.

But further. In His relationships to the *world* which was around Him, we see Him at once a *Conqueror*, a *Sufferer*, and a *Benefactor*. What moral glories shine in such an assemblage! He overcame the world, refusing all its attractions; He suffered from it, bearing witness against its whole course; He blest it, dispensing the fruit of His grace and power incessantly. Its temptations only made Him a Conqueror — its pollutions and enmities a Sufferer — its miseries only a Benefactor! What a combination!

It is not, however, *only* thus that we see our Lord Jesus in the Gospels. We have His *person*, His *virtues*, and His *ministry* in teaching and in doing — but without His *death* all to us would be nothing.

In "the place that is called Calvary," or onward to that place from the garden of Gethsemane, we see the great crisis (as we may surely call it) where *all* are engaged in their several characters, and all disposed of, answered or satisfied, exposed or revealed and glorified, according to their several

deserving. What a place, what a moment, presented to us and recorded for us by each of the evangelists in his different way

Man is seen there, taking, his place and acting his part, wretched and worthless as he is. He is there in all variety of conditions; in the Jew and in the Gentile; as rude and as cultivated; in the civil place and in the ecclesiastical; as brought nigh or as left in the distance; as privileged, I mean, or as left to himself. But, whatever this variety may be, all are exposed to their shame.

The Gentile Pilate is there, occupying the seat of civil authority. But if we look there for righteousness, it is oppression we find. Pilate bore the sword not merely in vain, but for the punishment of those who did well. He condemned the One Whom he owned to be "just," and of Whom he had said, "I find no fault in Him;" and the soldiers who served under him shared or exceeded his iniquity.

The Jewish scribes and priests, the ecclesiastical thing of that hour, seek for false witness; and the multitude who wait on them are one with them, and cry out against the One Who had been ministering to their need and sorrow.

Those who passed by, mere travellers along the road, men left in the distance, or as to themselves, revile, venting impotent hatred, as so many Shimeis in the day of David. And disciples, a people brought nigh and privileged, betray the common corruption, and take part in this scene of shame to man, heartlessly forsaking their Lord in the hour of danger, and when He had looked for some to stand by Him.

All is thus worthless. Exposed to all this variety, man is put to shame as in the face of creation; at this crisis, this solemn moment of weighing him and testing him, as for the last time. The woman with her box of ointment makes no exception. Her faith was of the operation of God; and beautiful as it was to be had in remembrance through the whole world, it is God's praise, and His alone, through the Spirit.

Satan, as well as men, shows himself in this great crisis. He deceives and then destroys. He makes his captive his victim, destroying by the very snare by which he had tempted. The bait becomes the hook, as it always does in his hand. The sin we perpetrate loses its charm the moment it is accomplished, and then becomes the worm that dies not. The gold and silver is cankered, and its rust eats the flesh as if it were fire. The thirty pieces of silver does this with Judas, the captive and the victim of Satan.

Jesus is here in His virtues and in His victories; virtues in all relationships, and victories over all that stood in His way. What patience in bearing with His weak, selfish disciples! What dignity and calmness in answering His adversaries! What self-consecration and surrender to the will of His Father! These were His virtues, as we track Him on this path, from His sitting at the table to His expiring on the cross. And then His victories! The Captive is the Conqueror, like the irk in the land of the Philistines. He came to put away sin and abolish death.

"His be the Victor's name

Who fought the fight alone."

God is here, God Himself, and in the highest. He enters the scene, as I may express it, when darkness covers all the land. That was His acceptance of the *offer* of the Lamb Who said, "Lo, I come." And such offer being accepted, God would show no mercy. If Jesus is made sin for us, it is unrelieved, unmitigated judgment He must have to sustain. The darkness was the expression of this. God was accepting the offer, and dealing with the Victim accordingly, abating nothing of the demands of righteousness.

And then, when the offer has been fulfilled, and the sacrifice rendered, and Jesus has given up His life, when the blood of the Victim has flowed, and all is finished, God, by another figure, owns the accomplishment of every thing, the fulness of the atonement, and the perfection of the reconciliation. The veil of the temple is rent from the top to the bottom. He that sits on the throne, that judges aright, and weighs all claims and their answers, sin and its judgment, peace and its price and its purchase, gives out that wondrous witness of the deep, ineffable satisfaction that He took in the deed that was then perfected in "the place that is called Calvary."

What a part for the blessed God Himself to take in this great crisis, this greatest of all solemnities, when every thing was taking its place for eternity!

And further still. Angels are here also, and heaven, earth, and hell; sin, also, and death, yea, and the world too.

Angels are here, witnessing these things, and learning new wonders. Christ is seen of them.

Heaven, earth, and hell are here, waiting on this moment; rocks and graves, the earthquake, and the darkness of the sky, bespeaking this.

Sin and death are disposed of, set aside and overthrown; the rent veil and the empty sepulchre publishing these mysteries.

The world learns its judgment in the sealed stone being rolled away, and the keepers of it forced to take the sentence of death in themselves.

Surely we may call this the Great Crisis — the most solemn moment in the history of God's dealings with His creatures. Wondrous assemblage of actors and of actings; God and Jesus, man and Satan, angels, heaven, earth and hell, sin and death, and the world, all occupy their place, whether of shame or of defeat, or of judgment, of virtues and of triumphs, of manifestations and of glory. This is the record of each of the evangelists in his several way, or according to his own method, under the Spirit. Our speculations can find no place. We have but to take up the lessons which they teach us, lessons for an ascertained and well-understood eternity.

And as I have thus looked a little carefully at the cross, so would I a little further at the empty sepulchre.

Victorious death, or resurrection from the dead, is the great secret. It was intimated in the very first promise: for the word to the serpent in Genesis 3 told of the death of Christ, and then of His victory; that is, of His victory by dying. The bruised One was to be a Bruiser.

Abel's sacrifice, and every sacrifice in either patriarchal or Mosaic times, bespoke death, and virtue in death — victorious, meritorious, expiating death.

Abraham's faith was in the same mystery. It was in the Quickener of the dead. It was the *pattern* faith; for he is called "the father of all them that believe."

Among the many voices of the prophets, the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, that well known scripture, announces the same mystery; for it tells of the *glories* of the *bruised* One; and that bespeaks or intimates victorious death.

The Lord, in His teaching, anticipates His death as a victorious One. speaking at times of His resurrection from the dead, and of His raising up on the third day the temple of His body. John 2.

The woman who anointed Him for His burial gives us an expression of faith in the same mystery. She believed that He would die and be buried, but that He would pass through death and the grave as a

Conqueror, and by that very process be introduced to His anointing or His glories. She understood the mystery of victorious death, or of resurrection from the dead, on which great fact the gospel hangs. Therefore it is that the Lord says of her, that wheresoever the *gospel* should be preached, her deed, her faith, should be had in remembrance. He made it a *pattern* faith, as Abraham's had been.

Then the epistles, in their day, abundantly open this same mystery, interpreting the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus as being the secret of the gospel.

Thus, all through, the victorious death of Jesus has been set forth. Without this great fact, redemption could not be — with it, redemption could not but be.

Sin and Christ meet, as I may express it, on the plains of death. Sin is death's sting, or inflicter; Christ is death's Conqueror, or Destroyer. They meet; and for certainty the result is the putting away of sin, and the redemption of its captive.

Resurrection *of* the dead simply, or the grave giving up the dead that are in it, would not be victory. The dead might be summoned from their graves, just to abide judgment; as those not written in the Lamb's book of life will be. It is resurrection *from* the dead that is victorious; and it insures redemption, and this great result, that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"; for "the Lord" is Jesus in resurrection, the Purger of sins, and the Abolisher of death. See Romans 10: 13.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is a *great fact*. Whether we will hear, or whether we will forbear, there it is, and cannot be gainsayed. Neither can we escape from its application to ourselves. It has to do with us, with each of us, again I say, whether we will or not. It has its different virtue, its twofold force and meaning; and — each one should know how it addresses itself to him. Still, there it is, and none can elude it. Jesus risen and glorified is set above us and before us, as the sun is set in the heavens, and the creation of God has to do with it.

And who could pluck the sun out of the sky?

The glory seated itself in the cloud, as Israel went through the wilderness; and Israel must know it to be there, and have to do with it there, be they in what condition they may. It may conduct them cheerfully, if they walk obediently; it will rebuke and judge them, if otherwise. But there it is, as over them and before them; and they cannot elude its application to them, again I say, be they in what condition they may.

So again. Prophets come forth from God among the people. There they are; and whether the people will hear, or whether they will forbear, they shall know that prophets have been among them. They cannot gainsay the fact, or elude its application.

And so again. Christ in the world, in the days of His flesh, was a kindred fact. Satan had to know that as a fact, and as applying to him; and man had his blessing brought to him by it, or his guilt and judgment aggravated. The kingdom of God had come nigh; and of this, and of the force of it, they had to assure themselves.

And just according to all this is the present great fact of the resurrection. Jesus is risen and exalted. He is ascended and glorified. We might as well attempt to pluck the sun out of the sky, as try to escape from the application of this great fact to our condition. It speaks of "judgment" and of "mercy," as we either look at the cross of Christ with convicted, interested hearts, or as we despise it and slight it. It has a voice in the ear of all. It speaks, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. There is, however, this distinction to be observed, and it is serious — to enjoy it as God's

salvation we must, personally, livingly, by faith, be brought into connection with it now. If we slight it all our days it will bring itself into connection with us by-and-by.

This, surely I may say, is serious. It brings to mind Mark 5. In spite of Satan, whether he would or not, the Lord Jesus brings Himself into connection with him in the person of the poor Legion of Gadara, in order to judge him, and destroy his work. But He does not put Himself and the virtue that He carried in Him into connection with the poor diseased woman in the crowd, till she, by faith, had brought herself and her necessity to Him.

This distinction has a deeply serious truth in it. If we, by faith, use not a risen Jesus now, and get the *virtue* that is in Him, He will visit us by-and-by with the *judgment* which will then be with Him. No deprecation will *then* avail — no seeking *now* can but avail.

The sequel is well weighed. It is vain for man, or the world, or the god and prince of it, to resist the risen Christ; it will be found to be but kicking against the pricks — self-destruction. It is vain for the sinner who trusts in the risen Christ to be doubting, for God has justified him. The righteousness of God is his who pleads redemption and ransom by the blood - the God-glorifying atonement of Jesus. His death was the vindication of God in full, glorious righteousness. Let God now pardon the vilest — the cross entitles Him to do so, and yet maintains His righteousness and moral glory in all perfectness. Yea, it is the righteousness of God which accepts the sinner who pleads the cross; for as the cross *maintains* God's righteousness, that righteousness is *displayed* in making righteous the sinner who pleads it.

And here I may add, we are ignorant of God — we have not the knowledge of Him, as the apostle speaks (1 Cor. 15: 34) — if we do not receive the fact or doctrine of resurrection. It is by that that God, in such a world as this, shows Himself in His proper glory. The enemy, through sin, has brought in death, and the Blessed One is displayed in victory over him — but this is only done by that great transaction which puts away sin and abolishes death. And resurrection is the witness of that.

The disciples were quite unbelieving as to this great fact, even after it had taken place. They were, at that time, exhibiting some very gracious and earnest affection, but they were betraying full unbelief as to this fact. But this is natural. More readily would we occupy ourselves for Him than believe that He has occupied Himself, fought and conquered, suffered and triumphed, for us.

With earnest affection the Galilean women visited the sepulchre. With boldness Joseph and Nicodemus claimed the body. It was something more than spices and ointments that embalmed it — it was love and zeal, and earnestness and tears. Magdalene lingers about the tomb, and Peter and John go to it as with rival haste. The two on the road to Emmaus, while they talk of Jesus, are sad; and godly kindlings stir in their hearts, as their fellow-Traveller makes Him His subject. All this was *gracious affection*; but with all this they were *unbelieving*. With this occupation of heart about Him, they did not receive the great fact of His victory for them

The Lord is not satisfied with this. How could He be? Sinners must know Him in the grace and strength that has met them in their need. The disciples come to the sepulchre diligently and lovingly, but still this will not do. By faith we must see Him coming to us as in our graves, and not think of going to Him in His grave. We are the *dead* ones, and not He; He is the *living* One, and not we. The Son of God entered this scene of ruin as a Redeemer of the lost, and as a Quickener of the dead. It is *that* which we must know. He was tender, knowing how to appreciate the affection; but He rebuked the unbelief, and stayed not till He carried the light of this great mystery to their hearts and consciences. "They worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" — thus, in spirit, as I may say, offering their meat-offering and their drink-offering, as on the bringing of "the sheaf of the first fruits"

out of the field, in the beginning of harvest. Lev. 23: 9-13.

Angels, however, were before them in this. They had learnt this mystery; they rejoiced in it; and in their way celebrated it. And we may, with comfort, when we think of this, say, What an interest is taken in heaven in the things that are transacted on earth! What intimacy of angels with sinners!

"Seen of angels" is part of "the mystery of godliness." The Christ of God is *the Object* with angels, while He is *going through His wondrous work and way for sinners!* Very blessed this is.

"The sons of God," the angels, shouted for joy when earth's *foundations* were laid; and the Book of the Apocalypse shows them taking their place and part in the great action when earth's career is *closing*.

They join in the joy that is known on high when a sinner first repents, and they minister to him all through his journey as an heir of salvation. We may therefore say again, What interested witnesses are they of all that concerns us! Hebrews 1: 14.

And what were they doing when Jesus was born? And what were they doing when Jesus had died? They are still present. They filled the plains of Bethlehem at the birth, they sit in the empty sepulchre after the resurrection. Is not this intimacy?

It has been said, and beautifully said, "The angels broke bounds that morning," when they appeared in crowds, and with exultation, to the shepherds. True; but they have been always "breaking bounds," always leaving their native heaven to interest themselves in the earth. That action in Luke 2 was but one chapter in their history.

Surely this intimacy of heaven with earth, this interest which the creatures of God there take in the objects of His grace here, tells us of the harmonies which are destined to fill the whole scene by-and-by. God is a God of order. The spheres which He forms and animates will be witnesses of these harmonies; and all will tell of the *skill of the hand* that has disposed them, and of the *love of the bosom* that has linked them.

And indeed, had it struck me before, I might have further added as to *man*, that his incorrigible, incurable condition is deeply, unanswerably proved. The rending of the veil leaves the scribes and priests as hardened and as wicked as ever, and the rending of the tomb leaves the soldiers that kept it in just the same state in which it found them. The one give money, and the other take it, to circulate a lie in the face of these awful and astounding facts. And surely we may say, the heart that can refuse fear and repentance and softening at the bidding of such visitations as these, such solemn doings of the hand of God as these, must stand convicted before us of being irrecoverably ruined. It is nothing less than the word "lost" that we have to inscribe on the human soul.

What moments, I may again say, are we contemplating thus at the close of each of the Gospels! We may say that, surely. The work accomplished has, however, given sinners, lost indeed in themselves, the very highest interests in God, and that for ever. It has given us a place in the *righteousness* of God it has given us likewise a place in the *family* of God. We are in relationship as well as in righteousness. We are sons — adopted as well as justified. By the cross God is revealed, as man is exposed. Man's condition of utter moral ruin was seen at Calvary, and there also is seen the glorious perfectness of God in goodness. The blood met the spear. The veil of the temple was rent in twain when the life of Jesus was yielded up — Jesus of Whom man had said, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." God is revealed, as man is exposed; and the revelation is perfect to His glory, as man's exposure was perfect to his shame.

It is indeed nothing less than a perfect, bright, and wondrous display of itself that grace is making. God's presence to the sinner is restored in righteousness. He puts the sinner before Himself in a way and character worthy of the place. But not only righteousness before God, but, as we have said, adoption with the Father is ours also. And further — acceptance in the Beloved, conformity with the image of the Son, heirship of all things with Him, a glorious body, and the Father's house, and Christ's own throne in the world to come: all these are the sinner's who by faith enters the veil which God's own hand, through the blood of Christ, has rent from top to bottom. To wealthy places indeed grace introduces us, as God is thus manifesting Himself. But into these wealthy places we must make our passage, *each one for himself*. This is an *individual* thing. Each one of us for himself must take this journey, and pass from the condition in which nature leaves us into these wealthy places. We are, beloved, to be individualized before Him; afterwards we may know our fellow-saints, recognize our alliance with them, learn our place in a body, or exercise ourselves and fill our part and our duties in the congregation of God.

A needed recollection this is for the soul at all times — a happy, comforting recollection for it, in days of confusion and breach and separation like the present. We must be individualized before God.

In other days the people of God were thus before Him on two very solemn occasions — at the giving of the law in Exodus 19, 20, and at the consecration of Aaron in Leviticus 8, 9.

While the Lord was delivering the law of the Ten Commandments, Moses brought the people to the foot of the hill, and kept them there till the words were ended. While Aaron was being put into office, and went through his priestly services in the presence of God, Moses again brought the people forth, and set them at the door of the tabernacle till the solemnity was accomplished.

This was not the ordinary thing. Commonly the people heard what concerned them, and were instructed in their duties, through Moses, or through Moses and Aaron. But on these two great occasions, the giving of the law, and the institution of the priesthood, all the congregation of Israel had to be present, that each one for himself, in seeing and hearing, might witness these things, and know them.

But not only so. They went through an exercise of soul suited to each occasion. They were not only spectators, but they were instructed and affected spectators.

At Sinai they cry out and tremble. And this was as it should be. Moses, as on the part of the Lord, approves this cry and terror. We cannot properly think of God in judgment without being as men listening to a sentence of death upon them.

At the door of the tabernacle, when the fire and the glory came down from heaven to attest the sufficiency of Aaron's services, and to pledge their results, the congregation shout, and fall on their faces, as worshipping and happy. And this, again, was as it should be. God was there, not as a Legislator amid the terrors of judgment, but as a Saviour amid the rich provisions of grace. And we cannot receive God in grace and salvation without an answer of thankfulness and joy (poor with some of us, indeed, as we know) in our spirits.

Thus was it of old with Israel. Thus were they all, each one for himself, individualized in the divine presence on these two great and solemn occasions, and they felt the authority of each according to its different virtue. They were all there. The living God and each individual soul were engaged there, God with them, and they, each of them, with God. It is well to mark this.

When a man has to be convicted he must himself be in God's presence. When, as a convicted sinner, he would be relieved and set free, he must be again, in God's presence. Such moments must be

intensely personal. We must, each of us, be born again — born again (may I say?) for himself — and pass, through the new birth, into the light and kingdom of God. "I know Whom I have believed," says one. "I am crucified with Christ," he says again; "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."

There is, surely, the sense of individual, personal possession of Christ breathed in such passages. And this is to be ours now. It was also the utterance in fainter accents, if you please, of a far distant voice. "I know that my Redeemer liveth," says a patriarch; "and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

Surely, beloved, we should seek intimacy of heart with Him. The first duty, as well the highest privilege, yea, and the sublimest acting of faith, is just to take our place before the Lord, acquainting ourselves with Him, and being at peace. Instead of painfully inquiring of ourselves whether we are making suited returns to Him, we should charge our hearts to enjoy Him in these wondrous manifestations of Himself. Our first duty to the light that shines in Him is to learn *what He is* — calmly, and thankfully, and joyfully to learn that; and not anxiously and painfully to begin by measuring ourselves by it, or seeking to imitate it. His presence should be our home; so that, in the twinkling of an eye, whether at morning, at noonday, or at eventide, we might pass in there with ease and naturalness, with an abundant entrance; as one expressed it years ago, "like those who have nothing to lose, but all to gain." Amen.

"The Lamb of God."

BLESSED the Jesus Whom we know

In love's unwearied paths below,

Tracked by evangelists when here,

Is He Who is ascended there;

And faith still knows Him as the same,

And reads with confidence His name.

God's glory shone in that blest face,

In power, dignity, and grace.

'Twas not the light of Sinai's brow,

Which made all Israel to withdraw;

There was not there a single beam,

However dazzling it might seem,

Which told the heart to get a veil

To hide it, lest it faint and fail.

"Master, where dwellest Thou?" they say,

And, gladly bidden, there they stay;
And in that new, though holy ground,
A dwelling-place their spirits found.

Conscience another set apart
In converse with his wakened heart;
But for the fig-tree's shade is given
Jesus, and then an opened heaven.

"Come see a Man that told me all,"
Was a convicted sinner's call;
And those who at her bidding come,
Like her, with Him soon find their home.

E'en she for whom the angry hill
Would yield its stones to stone and kill,
The accursed, condemned, and guilty one,
Remains at ease with Him alone.

Thus 'mid our ruins once it shone,
'Mid its own glories now 't is known;
But we can bear *it brightest* there,
Since we have learnt it *dearly* here.

Lord, I desire to trace Thee more
Than e'er mine eye has done before;

Each passage of Thy life to be
A link between my soul and Thee!
For we shall see Thee as Thou wert,
When every utterance of Thine heart,
Through all Thy works of love divine,
Made all our need and sorrow Thine.

And we shall see Thee as Thou art,
And in Thine image bear our part,

In glory Thou, in glory we,
Bright in the heavenly majesty!
No part of Thy blest life below
But in its fulness I shall know,

Retouched by Thee, regained by me,
 In realms of immortality!
With burning hearts we'll then rejoice
 In echoes of that well known voice,
 Which to two burning hearts of old
 Did mysteries of grace unfold:
The voice that stilled bold nature's strife,
 The voice that called the dead to life,
 Which said in sympathy, "I will,"
 And spake in power, "Peace, be still."
 The hand that touched disease away,
 And proved the sinking Peter's stay;
That raised the widow's child, and then
 To her fond arms gave back again;
The hand that washed the feet all clean,
 Speaking the heart that beat within;
 The lifted hand that blessed them here
 When parting, but to bless them there.
The arms which still are what they were
 When little children's home was there.
 The bosom, too, the same as when
 John the beloved leaned thereon.
Here changes wrought no change in Thee,
 The same from first to last we see;
 In life and resurrection Thou,
 Jesus! wert one both then and now.
 In sweetest, gentlest forms of grace,
Amid Thine own Thou took'st Thy place;
 The draught of fishes on the shore
 Bespoke Thee risen as before;
 And the spread table told of One,
The same, past, present, and to come.
 Fed in the wilderness of old,

The camp of God nor bought nor sold,
But stores of heaven were oped each morn,
And angels' food, or heaven's corn,
Conveyed on dew, supplied the place -
Grand, gorgeous miracle of grace!
And Thou, Lord Jesus, in Thy day,
Again didst food in deserts lay;
Yet not in grandeur of the past,
But dearer — what shall ever last —
 'T was Thine own
 heart that felt the need,
'T was Thine own hand the bread supplied.
'T was Thine own lips the blessing breathed -
Heart, hand, and lips the service weaved.
 These were Thy sympathies with us,
 And we shall ever know Thee. thus.
'Twas joy to Thee, while here on earth,
 To mark the progress of that birth
 Which leads poor sinners into light,
Forth from the gloom of nature's night.
'Twas joy to Thee while here on earth,
 To hail the bold approach of faith,
The faith that reached Thee through the crowd,
 Or, though forbidden, cried aloud.
 For love delighteth to be used.
Faith's earnest thoughts are ne'er refused.
 And this same joy and love in Thee,
 We know unchanged eternally.
 The look, the sigh, the groan, the tear,
Which marked Thy spirit's pathway here,
 We own them still, O Lord, in Thee,
 Thy mind, Thy heart, Thy sympathy!
 Of Calvary I speak not here;

Blood sealed our only title there:
It has its own peculiar place
Amid the mysteries of grace.
But the loved home at Bethany,
And neighbouring, lone Gethsemane,
Poor Nazareth and Bethlehem,
And faithless, proud Jerusalem,
The mount, the wilderness, the sea,
The villages of Galilee,
The gate of Nain, and Sychar's well,
The coasts of Sidon, all will tell
The One Who travelled here before,
And tell us we need ask no more,
But stand, with welcome, soon to be
At home for ever, Lord, with Thee!
Thus, memory knows Thee, through the Word,
In all Thy ways and doings, Lord!
And memory no fiction weaves,
But turns to truthful, living leaves,
The footprints of a real past,
Which shine, and hold for ever fast.
'Tis not descriptive words of Thee,
But illustrations clear we see.
God's glory in Thy face portrayed -
Bright, living likeness without shade.
Those who see Thee the Father see -
Wondrous and priceless mystery!
The heavens Creator-glory tell,
His power and Godhead they reveal;
But these are hints by which we frame
Some of the secrets of His name:
But all He is, by sinners known,
In one blest Image He has shown.

We have not there to guess and spell,
We read in lines, fair, bright, and full;
 We read it in our Saviour's face,
And, now, all doubts and searchings cease.
 The sinner looks, wayfaring men,
The poor, and babes and sucklings then;
 All learn Thee as Thou art and wert,
 And thus Thou art for ever learnt.
Whate'er of Thine has once been shown,
 That same is, sure, for ever known
 Thy virtues, like Thyself, all fair,
 No seed of change or loss is there:
 Each feature of Thy heart and mind
 For ever shineth, in its kind:
"Because 'tis Thine," makes this all plain,
 It must be still, for it has been:
 "Jesus the same, and ours for ever" -
No strength of hell this bond can sever.
 But *this* we pray — for know we well
The world's and nature's dangerous spell, -
 "Let no fair hope of human joy
 The fond, desirous heart employ!
 Let not the creature now repair
 The breaches of each passing year!
With lamps still trimmed, and virgin love,
 Teach us to wait Thee from above;
 As bridal children, fasting here,
Till Thou, the Morning Star, appear,
 To share with us that earliest light,
 Day's harbinger, so lone and bright;
Pledging, ere long a world new-born,
 Times of refreshing, like the morn."
Thus may our hopes and fears be past,

And with Thyself our lot be cast!
Eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard,
What Thou in glory hast prepared
For him who loves and waits for Thee
In thine own world with Thee to be;
With Thee, Who art no stranger here
Though we as yet be strangers, there.