

Some Glories of Christ

As typified in the Ark of the Covenant and its Contents (Exodus 25).

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Table of Contents

The Ark.....	1
The Tables of Stone.....	2
The Pot of Manna.....	3
Aaron's Rod.....	3
The Mercy Seat.....	3
The Veil.....	4

Our Lord Jesus Christ and His glories are of commanding interest to His saints, and the unceasing activities of the Holy Spirit are to keep Him before us, and, than Himself, nothing can be so precious to our souls that have learned His love through His atoning death.

The Book of God has Him as its centre and object, but nowhere is the holy grandeur of His glory seen more strikingly than in the tabernacle and its furniture. Here, as it is said of the temple, "every whit utters glory" (Ps. 29). The divine and human, official and sacrificial, dispensational and moral commingle; everywhere we turn the manifold glories of Christ are disclosed.

The Ark.

Exodus 25. gives the order of the house as in the mind of God, and the ark comes first. It is the vessel which with its appendages formed the throne of God in Israel, the place where His glory dwelt (Ps. 80. 1). From the character of the instruction it is clear that what is immediately in view is the journey from the desert to Canaan. The rings and staves speak of its passage through the wilderness to its place in the purpose of God. From this point of view it connects with our wilderness journey and looks forward to the coming day of glory.

Every Israelite had an interest in the ark, for, carried on the shoulders of the Levites, it took the lead in the desert to find a place for the host of Israel, and as it passed into the bed of the Jordan the waters of the overflowing river rolled back, like the band of John 18. 6 at the presence of Jehovah. "What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back" (Ps. 114: 5). It was thus that a way was made for God's people to pass over.

The diligent reader of Scripture will follow its course from its being carried round Jericho to Shiloh (Joshua 18), and from there to the lamentable time when it was taken by the Philistines, then to Bethshemesh, the house of Abinadab in the hill country, and so on till it was eventually put into the place prepared for it by Solomon (2 Chr. 35: 3), and it will be noted that at all times the majesty of God surrounded it. Its history terminates in mystery, for we hear no more of it after the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

Let us dwell a little on the beauties of the Lord as presented by the Spirit in this vessel, for it may indeed be said that it is the highest figure of Him in Holy Scripture. Here we are taught something of our Lord Jesus Christ as the One who binds together the moral universe of God, giving effect on the part of God to the counsels of the Godhead. A brief comparison of the three articles which were set in the outer apartment may help to make this clear. In these we learn how He associates His people with Himself in the maintenance of what is suitable to God in (1) worship, (2) true witness, and (3) administration, as seen in the golden altar, the lampstand, and the table.

But inside stood the mystic vessel which gives us Christ absolutely alone in the majesty of His being as the sustainer of all the glory of God. In the Gospels, which may answer to the inner apartment, we have that which is true in Him, but in the Epistles, which give the outer, we have "that which is true in Him and in you." In the former He, "the corn of wheat," stands alone; in the latter, through His glorious redemption, others are brought into blessing for God's glory, and while ever remaining alone in His glory as God, He is also the Firstborn among many brethren.

In the gold and wood the adoring heart sees Deity and humanity. "The Word became flesh." The distance between God and man was bridged by incarnation, though for its complete removal the cross had to come in. God and man are brought together; in One who, being God, could unfold all the deep perfections of His love, while maintaining the claims of His throne, and as perfect man could glorify God in the place of man's responsibility and bruise the serpent's head. With holy reverence we may behold this divine reality. Not a vision, not a phantom, not an apparition, but "*Jesus Christ come in flesh*" (1 John 4: 2, 3). The mystery of mysteries! The miracle of all miracles! "God manifest in flesh." Can we be surprised at anything in the presence of this; before it holy angels bow, rendering their homage and praise; they are His obedient servants, whether in the day of His sojourn here or in His ascended glory now. But there is reserved for man as redeemed by Him a more exalted note of praise than even they can raise, "the high praises of God" (Ps. 149).

The Tables of Stone.

There were three things in the ark (Heb. 9: 4): the golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant. The latter only are in view in our chapter (Ex. 25). Rich and precious as is the instruction connected with the two former things, yet we must note that all the glory of the throne is based upon the tables of the covenant. They spoke of Christ; for all that constitutes the glory of that throne — the being, nature, and character of God, the eternal unchanging principles of His will, as expressed in the tables of stone, find their true and proper resting-place and expression in Christ.

In Psalm 40. the Lord comes into view saying, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God: *yea Thy law is within My heart.*" This is the true answer to the tables of stone in the ark. And when we remember that these same tables are spoken of in 2 Corinthians 3 as a ministration of death we see the infinite moral distance that lay between Christ as man and the whole human race. That which was to man, even under divine culture, a ministration of death, was in Him the delight of His heart and the very sustenance of His being. But the divine thought was to possess the heart of man, and the beautiful moral connection between Christ and His people is shown in Hebrews 10. There the Apostle speaks of the "will of God," in regard to the death of Christ, and in regard to our sanctification. "By the which will we are sanctified," the end in view being, "I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them" (Heb. 10: 7, 9, 10, 16). God will have men who in heart and mind shall delight in the law of the Lord. They shall take character from Christ. (See also 2 Cor. 3: 3, where instead of the law it is Christ written in the heart, and also Rom. 8. 4)

The Pot of Manna.

Now the question arises: What special importance attaches to the pot of manna and Aaron's rod that they should also have a place in the ark? The manna was Israel's food, "spiritual food" from heaven, typical of the heavenly grace given of God to sustain His people in their pilgrimage through this wilderness world. It speaks of the life of the Man Christ Jesus. We may fail to appreciate the wonderful grace of that pathway wherein was the perfect combination and exhibition of "every beautiful grace," yet blessed it is to see that God has decreed that it should be treasured up before Him for ever. Psalm 16, given by the Spirit of Christ in David, shows the dependence, obedience, and devotedness of that path, and as it cannot be confined to the days of His ministry it shows the whole course covering the eighteen hidden years not mentioned in the Gospels. Finding His little band of followers among the poor of the people, the subject of angelic ministry, dependent on a poor and sinful woman for a drink. "Foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests," but He, "the Son of Man, had nowhere to lay His head." Everything bespoke His complete dependence. And if we look for a moment at the other side of His life as brought out by the need of others: He commanded the resources of creation, multiplied the bread to feed His rejectors, readjusted the distorted conditions of humanity so that disease in every variety was displaced.

Add to this that, in His teaching, not only was the whole of the Scriptures open before Him as their Author, but Nature also unfolded to Him her treasures. The various kingdoms of nature contributed (Matt. 13 and Luke 12), the family also (Luke 15) and the unseen world (Luke 16). All this, though it may carry us beyond the thought of manna, furnishes an answer to the question Why was it in the ark? A true-living Man, stamping His own heavenly character on all, meets us at every turn, and though He is in changed circumstances, still He remains in His own eternal sameness, and in Him the witness of those thirty-three years shall be perpetuated through all eternity. The hidden manna of Revelation 1: 17 is doubtless an allusion to Christ in this way, and is connected with reward, confidence, and communion.

Aaron's Rod.

Aaron's rod recalls a crisis in the history of the people which necessitated a divine intervention. "Men of renown envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the Lord." They refused in type the priesthood and royalty of Christ and brought on themselves the judgment of God. In the laying-up of the rods and the budding of Aaron's the truth of resurrection as the turning point of all God's ways comes to light. This may account for its being in the ark. It is by resurrection that Christ is marked out Son of God with power, and the priesthood which before stood on expiation, is now established on resurrection, and we learn that God's new creation rests not merely on the blood of Christ but on His glorious resurrection as the firstfruits for God.

The Mercy Seat.

The ark with its contents was covered by the mercy seat which formed a lid, and with it, all one piece, was the cherubim of beaten work called the "cherubim of glory" between which and above the mercy seat sat the cloud of glory, symbol of Jehovah's presence. Everything spoke of glory having for its basis the testimony contained inside the ark. The point in this chapter is evidently the glory of Christ and not the atonement, for this latter we have to go to Leviticus 16, where the blood is put upon the mercy seat. Here it is the meeting place. "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee."

"God was in Christ . . . reconciling the world to Himself," putting Himself in touch with man in Him. What a comment on the Gospels is Hebrews 1 "God . . . spoken in Son." In Him we get the revelation of God. That which no prophet knew of He speaks out. Being in heaven, He could speak of heavenly things.

Nowhere could anything be found to surpass what He unfolds in the Gospel of John (though this may go beyond the type we are considering). He calls His disciples friends in the intimacy of divine love, and makes known the divine communications to them (John 15). But John 17 exceeds all, for there He draws aside the veil and show us what engaged the Father and the Son in the eternal past, then looks ahead and shows the coming display of His own glory, and His people loved by the Father in the same circle of love with Himself. All this anticipates the cross, and just as the mercy seat of Exodus 25 — place of divine communication — had in view the blood-sprinkled mercy seat of Leviticus 16 — place of atonement — so all the heavenly revelations of love and glory which came out during the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ had in view the cross and new creation. Romans 3 is the answer to the blood-sprinkled mercy seat, a risen Saviour has gone in in the rights of redemption, and the eye of faith sees Him even now as the One who bears the glory (Zech. 6: 13). "A Lamb as it had been slain." Wondrous thought! The Saviour, bearing the marks of the conflict is in the centre of the glory. Nor is it in the mercy seat alone that the distinction between incarnation and redemption is seen, it may be traced also in the cherubim.

The Veil.

From Exodus 26: 31 we learn that in the holy veil there were cherubim, and the Spirit of God in Hebrew 10: 20 speaks of this veil as "His flesh" — thus signifying that all that these wondrous mystic figures represent was set forth in the earth life of the Lord Jesus. The cherubim stood in relation to the tables of testimony which formed the basis of God's direct government in Israel, and through them to all the earth. They speak of the activities of the throne, as seen in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4, where the four heads of creation set forth the intelligence, power, stability, and rapidity of the judgment of the throne, or rather of Him who sits thereon. All this awe-inspiring grandeur which shines in the infinite God — set before us here in figures to suit our creature capacity — has been set forth in grace in the Man Christ Jesus.

We may note briefly a few instances of this coming out in the Gospels.

INTELLIGENCE. "Before Philip called thee . . . I saw thee." "But Jesus . . . knew what was in man." "We speak that we do know." (John 1: 48; 2: 24, 25; 3: 11. Also 1 Chr. 28: 9; Jer. 3: 24; 20: 23; Rev. 5: 6.)

POWER and MAJESTY as seen in the lion comes out both in the moral and material spheres. "Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace and come out of him." "And He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth." "Whom seek ye? . . . they went backward, and fell to the ground." "And He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. . . and there was a great calm." (Mark 1: 25; John 11: 43; John 18: 4-6; Mark 4: 39; Isa. 40: 28.)

STABILITY. It is in Mark we have the perfect Servant, working long after sunset and away in the morning before daybreak to a solitary place to pray. "He set His face to go to Jerusalem." "I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day." (Mark 1: 32-35; Luke 9: 51; John 9: 4.)

RAPIDITY OF JUDGMENT is seen in the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree (Matt. 21: 12, 13, 19, 20).

All this and much more, which the diligent may trace out, comes out in the life of our Lord here; in Him we see the glory of the throne shine out. "Unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.... Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity. Therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows."