

# A Full Christ for Empty Sinners.

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*John 6.*

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*BT N8, 326 etc.*

Well does the writer remember the effect on his own mind of the perusal, now many years ago, of a paper in the first volume of the "Christian Witness," on "The distinct characters of the several writings of the New Testament." If not the first, it was among the first means of leading him to read Scripture in the light of the characteristic subject and aim of each distinct portion of it. But; while leaning on God's grace as the only efficient cause of true instruction, every attempt to impart to others what has been so precious to his own soul, has served more deeply to convince him of the truth of one remark in the paper above referred to, viz., that, "The expression of one's own thoughts, and the acting so as to awaken similar thoughts in others, are two very different things; and the latter is a rarer and more self-denying attainment than the other." It is not as attempting much more than the former, that the following thoughts are submitted to such as bring all they read and hear to the test of the word of God itself.

Much that at that time had to some of us all the vividness and freshness of truth newly discovered to the soul, has long, as to the letter of it, at least, been familiar to all who are likely to read these remarks. The way in which the same blessed Person is presented in Matthew as the Messiah of Israel; by Mark, in active service as the Minister of the word; by Luke, in the fulness of that grace, in which He, the Son of man, came to men as such, to seek and to save that which was lost; and by John as the Word which was in the beginning, which was with God, and was God, but which was made flesh, and dwelt among us; all this the reader has doubtless read and heard again and again, until the words remain in the memory, whether they be understood and enjoyed through divine teaching or not. The peculiar character of John's Gospel has been dwelt upon by many. Many have pointed out how the glory which passes before us in that Gospel is the glory of Christ in His highest divine titles and relations; "the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Sweetly has it been shown, moreover, that while no other Gospel so freely unfolds this highest Godhead-glory of Christ, no other shows the sinner in such immediate contact with Him, receiving of His fulness. These and other leading features of the book, though never losing their interest, have yet to numbers become familiar truth. What the writer would now suggest may bear no comparison in importance with these chief characteristics of this Gospel; but nothing is lost which contributes in ever so small a degree to acquaintance with the precious record of the glory of Him of whom it is said, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

In perusing any book, inspired or uninspired; if we find certain words occurring often enough to awaken attention to the fact, and then, on examination, discover that they are thus used throughout the book, we immediately conclude that they either express its great theme and object, or at least that which is very closely related thereto. Reading thus the Gospel of John, certain words can scarcely fail to impress the mind with the frequency of their use; while a

comparison with the other Evangelists confirms the conviction that the words in question do really bring out what is in closest connection with the great leading subject. For instance, the word *life* meets the eye almost at the beginning of the book, reappears most prominently in John 3, and afterwards, indeed with such frequency as to awaken the enquiry, Can this be one of the leading words in this Gospel? Can it have a characteristic force? Let us see.

But, before comparing this Gospel with the others in this respect, we do well to remember that there are more words than one in the New Testament rendered life. One ζωή, means life, in the strict, absolute sense. I speak only of the use of this, and other words, in the New Testament.\* Another, ψυχή, soul, is frequently represented by the word *life*; but it is not the natural, ordinary use of the word; and if it were, it is as often so given in John as in any other of the Gospels. The word βίος, used for *life*, in the secondary sense of living, or way of living, does not occur in our Gospel at all. It is to the first word, ζωή, life in its absolute sense, that our inquiry relates. It occurs in Matthew, seven times; in Mark, four times; in Luke, six times; and in John, thirty-six times. Its force and bearing, as thus characterizing John, may be estimated by such passages as, "In him was *life*"; "Not perish, but have everlasting *life*"; "Passed from death unto *life*"; "The resurrection of *life*"; "I am the bread of *life*"; "I am come that they might have *life*"; "That he should give eternal *life*"; "That, believing, ye might have *life*, through his name." Is it nothing that in the midst of this world of death, the One who has life in Himself has been here to manifest it in His own person, and to impart it to us who were dead in sins? Nor has His rejection by the world, and His ascension on high interrupted for a moment this outflow of *life* from Him to dead sinners. He is glorified of the Father, who has given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal *life* to as many as the Father "has given" Him.

\*The word πνεῦμα spirit, is once rendered *life*, in Rev. 13: 15, which has no bearing on our present inquiry.

But let us turn to another word — love. Here, also, we have two words, ἀγαπάω and θιλέω, each with its shade of meaning, rendered to love in the English New Testament. Taking both these verbs, with words immediately related to them, such as the noun love, we find one or other of them in Matthew twelve times; in Mark, five times; in Luke fifteen times; and in John fifty-six times. Nor can we doubt the force of such words as characterizing this Gospel, in view of such passages as the following: "God so loved the world"; "Now, Jesus *loved* Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus"; "Having *loved* his own which were in the world"; "One of his disciples, whom Jesus *loved*"; "As I have *loved* you, that ye also *love* one another"; "If a man *love* me, he will keep my words, and my Father will *love* him"; "That the world may know that I *love* the Father"; "Thou hast *loved* them as thou hast *loved* me." LIFE and LOVE! Precious words! Life the gift of love. Divine love, in the person of the Son, bestowing a life, not only eternal in its duration, but of such a nature that the love wherewith the Father loved the Son can now rest on those of whom He said, addressing the Father, "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the *love* wherewith thou hast *loved me* may be in them, and I in them."

But in what sphere does the revelation of this love take place? True it is that none profit by it vitally and everlastingly, but they in whom the native opposition of the heart is overcome by almighty grace, in the positive communication of life. But is it only among God's ancient people Israel that such persons are found? Are they the only inheritors of this blessedness, so

immeasurably surpassing their fruitful land, the covenanted portion of their tribes? Let us see. The word world is quite as characteristic of our Gospel as either of those which have been under consideration. We stop not to notice the word αἰών, sometimes translated world, but intrinsically referring more to duration than to the world itself, absolutely considered. "The times which pass over it," the world morally viewed, is what it signifies. The word κόσμος, the world literally, including both the earth and its human inhabitants, occurs in Matthew nine times, in Mark three times, in Luke three times, and in John seventy-nine times. How it is used, the reader may judge from such instances as — "God so loved the *world*"; "The Saviour of the *world*"; "I am the light of the *world*"; "Now is the judgment of this *world*"; "I came not to judge the *world*, but to save the *world*," "The *world* seeth me no more," "The prince of this *world*"; "I have overcome the *world*"; "I pray not for the *world*"; "They are not of the *world*, even as I am not of the *world*"; "The *world* hath not known thee." Could it be more evident than it is, that when the Eternal Word — the only-begotten Son — was made flesh and dwelt among men, the question was one which concerned not Israel alone, or Israel more than others, but the whole world! It was towards the world the love of God was shown in the gift of His only-begotten Son. It was as the Saviour of the world that the blessed Lord Jesus appeared, and as the light of the world He shone; and, now that He has left the world, and returned to the Father who sent Him, He has left the world under the solemn responsibility of rejecting Him, and of not loving the Father of whose love He was both the messenger, the gift, and the expression. If He had tears for Jerusalem, and said, "How often would I have gathered thy children together . . . but ye would not," with what feelings did He bid farewell to the world, towards which such love had been shown, and by which such love had been repulsed and trodden under foot?

But there is one other word in its comparative use illustrative of the difference between this Gospel and the others. It is the word πιστεύω, *to believe*. We have it in Matthew eleven times, Mark fifteen times, Luke eight times, and in John ninety-nine times. Nor does this amazing disparity exhibit the whole amount of the difference. Six out of the eleven occurrences of the word in Matthew give it in connection with miracles, or in reference to false prophets, or in the lips of ungodly scoffers. So of eight passages in Mark, out of the fifteen that it contains. But in John, the vast majority of cases in which the word is employed, are those in which it expresses the believing in Christ Himself unto life eternal. "That all through him might *believe*"; "To them that *believe* on his name"; "That whosoever *believeth* on him should not perish"; "He that *believeth* on me hath everlasting life"; "If ye *believe* not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins"; "Dost thou *believe* on the Son of God? Lord, I *believe*."

It is added by the Holy Ghost to the last quotation, concerning the man that had been blind, "And he worshipped him." May we all have his simplicity of faith, and more of the deep joy which filled and overcame his heart in gazing with his new-found sight on the One whom he now beholds by faith as the "Son of God." It is to faith alone that the discovery is made of His glory and His grace; and faith counts the One whom it receives as unspeakably more precious than all attendant blessings, privileges, and favours, vast and unutterable as these may be. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name."

Thus have we seen the life revealed in Christ, and bestowed by Him as the gift of the Father's love in Him, not to any class or nation privileged by descent, but to all to whom it is

given to *believe* on Him throughout the wide *world*. To that world itself, indeed, was the coming down to it of God's well-beloved Son, the expression of a love on God's part, which has no measure but the gift that it bestowed. "God so *loved* the *world*, that he *gave* his only-begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting *life*." Never, till at the moment of now perusing it, had it been noticed by the writer, that in this one verse all our four words are found — life, love, world, believing! Thus does it gather, as into one focus, the light shed throughout the book from the person, mission, and work, the life, death, and resurrection — victory of the Son of God.

In turning to John 6, one point it is important to consider; that is, the contrast between the way in which Christ is presented here, and in the previous chapter. Life, in its communication by Him, and its inception by us, is the theme of both chapters; but in the fifth He is seen in full Godhead-title and glory, as the Source and Dispenser of the life sovereignly imparted by Him to us. The recipient of the life is regarded as entirely passive, and called into life by the almighty, new-creating, voice of the Son of God. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." Here, there is nothing in the case of the sinner but the powerlessness of death itself, till the deep silence. is broken by the voice of the Son of God, who never thus speaks in vain. His voice makes itself heard in the soul, till then dead, but no longer dead as it hears the voice of the Son of God. It lives. "They that hear shall live." But we read here of no exercises or feelings, no desires or sense of need, of which Christ is the object. It is Christ in divine title and competency, as the Son of God, who speaks; and the soul, till then dead, hears and lives.

But in John 6, our Lord is seen in the place of humiliation He had assumed as man, "come down from heaven," and the object thus of those desires, and of that sense of need, of which the quickened soul is conscious, but conscious, mark, because of the sin and ruin which it know not till the voice of the Son of God broke in on its deep sleep of death. It is not always, perhaps not often, that these things can be distinguished in fact. The discovery of Christ in the soul, awakens, perhaps, the first sense of desire after Him, producing thus the hunger and thirst which He only, in further discoveries of Himself and of His work, can appease. But though this may be true in principle, as it surely is, the soul, while going through this passage in its history, is too much occupied with itself to distinguish very accurately the order of its experiences. What is of infinitely greater moment is the truth by which, instrumentally, they are produced; and this, blessed be God! we have in all its fulness and variety in the scriptures under review, and in other portions of God's holy word.

In the early part of our chapter, we find our Lord fulfilling, in the midst of Israel, the predictions of Ps. 132, where, in connection with Jehovah's choice of Zion, and placing David's son upon the throne, we read, "I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread." But though Jesus be thus manifested as the heir of all the glories prophetically unfolded in the psalm, He is not here taking that place. Israel and the earth were as yet unfit for this; and God's time for it had not arrived. Hence Jesus retires before the urgency awakened of His own act in this feeding of the multitude. When they would have taken Him by force to make Him a king "he departed again into a mountain himself alone." Indicating thus that He would be on high during the postponement of His kingdom, His absence was continued until His disciples were in great trouble through a storm by which they were overtaken in crossing the lake. Jesus rejoins

them with words of comfort, "and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went." This episode does not so much refer to the church, or to the saints composing it, as to the Jewish remnant in days to come. The return to them of the now absent but exalted Messiah will both hush the storm which will be threatening their total overthrow, and conduct them at once into the haven of rest. The heavenly saints will be taken from amid the whole scene of trial and of conflict, to be with their Lord whom they meet in the air.

All this, however, is but introductory to the great subject of the chapter, which is linked with these details by the inquiry of those who next day followed our Lord to the other side of the lake. They seem to have been swayed by the most sordid motives with which they are pointedly charged by the Lord. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for him hath God the Father sealed." If they would come after Him, and this was all the "labour" they had performed, He would have them come for that which would endure. Not the perishing sustenance of a life which shortens each moment of its existence, but the imperishable food of an imperishable life, which it was the great errand and business of the Son of man to give. Son of man He is, blessed be His name, and not simply Son of God; but in this place of humiliation to which He had stooped, how had the Father singled Him out from the whole race of mankind, setting upon Him alone the seal which marked Him out as the object of the Father's perfect approval and infinite delight. Believers are now, since the resurrection and ascension of the Lord, sealed; but it is in Christ that they are thus distinguished. "In whom, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." Christ was sealed because of His intrinsic perfections; we, through our identification with Him in the place He has taken as having accomplished redemption. But the verse under consideration brings us to the Son of man as giving "meat which endureth unto everlasting life."

They who could follow Christ for loaves only, seek to excuse themselves for the neglect of this better gift. "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" is their next question. In what lovely, patient grace does the Lord reply, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Is He the One who, of all that ever trod this earth, was counted worthy to be sealed of God the Father? How evident, then, that to believe on Him is that which God must approve, and without which nothing else can be accepted in His sight.

The only answer of the people is an inquiry after signs, with a reference to the manna in their fathers' days, which seems intended to depreciate, by comparison, the miracle of the day before. It is as though they would say, "If you would have us believe in you as the sent One of God, you must shew us greater works than these. You have fed five thousand once; our fathers, in Moses' day, ate manna for forty years": as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." Then did our Lord begin to unfold the great subject of the chapter. The reasonings of Jewish pride and unbelief gave Him the occasion; but, dealing with these in the most unsparing way, how does He, at the same time, present Himself as the Object on which any hungry, thirsty, fainting, perishing one might feed and live for ever. "A full Christ for empty sinners" indeed. These Jews were not such, and so went away. But how many fainting ones, perishing with hunger, have here been regaled, and found in Jesus the bread of life!

The remainder of our chapter affords us a threefold view of this blessed One. Christ incarnate — Christ slain — Christ ascended. May we have grace to listen, to receive, and to worship.

"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." How simple, and yet how weighty and conclusive His answer to their unexpressed thoughts about Moses, as though Moses were shown, by the miracle of the manna, to be greater than our Lord. "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven." He was but a receiver of it, like the people themselves, who subsisted on it for forty years. It was God's gift, and despised, alas! by those who lived on it, just as "the true bread" was now being despised by their descendants. Our Lord does not pursue the subject of the manna. He does not say, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but my Father did. No; He would not speak of the manna in connection with the Father's name, as though the import of that name were disclosed by the gift from heaven of bread for six hundred thousand men and their families for forty years. Was this more, in reality, than His feeding all His creatures every day and every hour? "Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." So vast are the Creator's stores, and so easy their application in Providence to the creature's need!

But the Father's name is linked with deeper wonders far. All the riches of grace are told out in the revelation of that name. "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." What was that? The answer is at hand. "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." The Father's provision for a dying world was to send from heaven His only begotten Son. His appearing here was as the lowly Son of man. The fact was of worldwide interest. All alike needed this bread from heaven, and all alike were welcome. Not to Jew or Gentile, as distinct and privileged, but to the whole race as perishing, was this bounty sent. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (1 John 4: 9); "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5: 19). But the world would not be reconciled. It had no taste, no appetite for this "bread from heaven." There might be the momentary movement of the affections by His gracious words, leading some present to cry, "Lord, evermore give us this bread"; but it was only to make their rejection of Him more manifest and decisive when they came to understand His meaning. But let us listen to His words.

"And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." Dear reader, do you understand these words? Has your soul-hunger been appeased by this "bread from heaven," this "bread of life"? Has your soul-thirst been quenched by receiving in Him and of Him the water of life? Or is it possible that one who reads these lines should fall under the condemnation of the words next uttered by Christ? "But I said unto you, that ye also have seen me, and believed not." No language so cutting as that of rejected mercy, repulsed and slighted love! Here was this blessed One; His errand to this world nothing less than to be the expression of His Father's love, and the Saviour of lost men! He bore His credentials in every gracious word that fell from His lips, and every action of His perfect spotless life. One of these, the miracle of the loaves, had attracted after Him the multitude, who from selfish motives had followed Him across the lake. They confessed thus that

they had "seen" Him; but, alas! they "believed not." When they understood that He was the bread of life, they shew plainly it was not for such food that they had come. They would have had another meal such as on the day before; but for the One who gave it they had no heart. He had come to save them, if they would, from a worse death than that by hunger, but they had no sense of their danger and need in this respect, and therefore had no heart for Jesus as their Saviour; and they would not receive Him. Nor would any, with Christ shown to them thus and nothing more.

These men were not worse than others. Their unbelief was manifest and declared; and He treats them, therefore, as unbelievers, as rejecters; but this is what would be the result in every case, were we left to our own thoughts of Christ, when thus seen as "come down from heaven." Thank God, there is something more. Christ had not only come, as bringing life and love so near to the world, to men as such, that only by refusing the life and repelling the love could they hold on in their sins; He had come to fulfil the counsels of His Father's love in the sovereign gift of life, as shown in John 5; and of this He now proceeds to speak, though still as "come down" and here in humiliation, the Object for faith to receive and appropriate. Such faith, it was evident, had no place in man's heart; but God could give it, and would sovereignly in His grace. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."

How humiliating and heart-breaking for us, that, in the presence of incarnate life and love in the Person of the incarnate Son of God, no one would have come to Him, no one have been benefited by His mission, had there not been those who were given Him of the Father, and on whose coming therefore He could securely reckon. Man's will would, in each individual, have held out against Christ, had not the Father resolved that He should have some as the trophies of His victory, and the reward of His coming down from heaven. Alas, that our deadness to such love should have called forth such sighs as seem to breathe in these words of Jesus. Is it not as though He were accounting to Himself for the marvels of human unbelief? — as though saying, After all, it is but what I might have counted on? Nothing will affect man's stony heart, save where My Father's grace effectually intervenes, and on that I may securely count. All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me. And, then, to see how perfectly He fills the servant-place He had taken. For any now to come to Him is the proof of their being among those given to Him of the Father; so He may well declare of such that He will cast none out. The heart to come to Jesus is the sure sign to Him, had that been needed, of His Father's gracious working; and, therefore, He is but obedient to His Father's will in receiving, without question as to the past, all who come to Him. "Him that cometh to Me, I will *in no wise* cast out." Precious words! Rich has been the comfort they have yielded to many an otherwise desponding one; but how greatly is their value enhanced when the coming to Christ is seen, not as an act of man's fickle will, but as the effect of the Father's drawing to Jesus of one given to Him in the counsels of that Father's love before the foundation of the world.

Then, too, as we have just seen, the reception of such a one by the Saviour, irrespective of every consideration beside, is not merely the fruit of His compassion for the sinner, but of His grateful obedient acceptance, as the servant of His Father's will, of the one sent to Him, brought to Him, by the unseen drawings of that Father's love. All thus rests, not upon any fancied good in the sinner, but upon the Father's choice and the Son's obedient love. "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will; but the will of Him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it

up again at the last day." How He thus discloses that a far deeper and more important work had been entrusted to Him than that of satisfying Israel's poor with bread; no less a charge than that of raising up at the last day all given to Him of the Father, without losing one. Blessed Lord! to whom besides could this charge have been entrusted?

But, while disclosing, as above, that His real errand was one not depending for its issues on man's will, known already to be so perverse as in every case to reject the Saviour — an errand, too, embracing the safe production by Christ in resurrection blessedness of all given to Him by the Father — it is touching to find how solicitously He leaves wide open the door to any one anywhere who is disposed to enter. He may not, as yet, be able to account for the change in his own condition, as we have seen it accounted for by the Saviour; he is not the less welcome, or his final safety the less certain and unfailing. "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

The great stumbling-block to the Jews at that time was His professing to have come down from heaven, just as afterwards, in Paul's day, the doctrine of "Christ crucified" was "to the Jews a stumbling-block." And for precisely the same reason, their pride disdained the being indebted to One so lowly; and they were so self-satisfied as to see no need for One to come from heaven, and much less for One to die upon the cross to meet their case and be their Deliverer and Redeemer. Their case, as they thought, was by no means so desperate as this. They could not have denied their national subjection to the stranger's yoke; and, a "great prophet" to have stirred up the people to crowd around the standard of some great commander who would have led them on to victory over their Roman oppressors — this would have been a Messiah to their mind.

But for a plain, homely man, reputed to be the son of a carpenter of Nazareth, to profess to have come down from heaven and to speak of Himself as the bread of life, engaging to raise up His followers at the last day; in other words, for the lowly Jesus to present Himself as the Saviour of their souls and the giver of everlasting life, this was a deliverance and a Deliverer of which they felt no need, and for whom they had no relish. They did not hunger for such bread; they did not thirst for such life-giving draughts. "The Jews then murmured at Him, because He said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that He saith, I came down from heaven?" They could understand that a heavenly existence prior to His being a man on earth was implied in this language; in other words, that it was divine glory, veiled in His lowly place and condition as Son of man, which was in these words declared by Him as His. With this implied claim they contrast what they suppose to be His origin, and inquire, "How is it then that He saith, I came down from heaven?"

In answer to all such cavillings the Lord only again retires into His own consciousness of how the case really stood. "Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw Him: and I will raise him up at the last day." No one hungers for the bread of life so as to come to the Saviour except as drawn by a sense of urgent need which exists in none but those whom the Father draws. The prophets had declared of all who should inherit Israel's promised blessings in the latter day, "And they shall be all taught of God." This scripture our Lord quotes, and again consoles Himself with the assurance, "Every man therefore

that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me." All in Israel who had inwardly heard God's voice, not only came to Jesus, but were overjoyed to do so. Take Nathanael for an instance (John 1: 49). It was these dealings of God with the soul under the fig-tree, these humbling discoveries of self and sin leading to guileless confession of total ruin, that accounted for any coming to Christ. But, as it were, excluding the sense which might have been put on His words, the Lord adds, "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save He which is of God, He hath seen the Father."

What treasures do these few words unfold. However souls may be taught of God, drawn of the Father, and consequently come to Christ, it is not that the Father is immediately revealed, so as to be seen. There was no incarnation of the Father, as of the Son. He abides in unmanifested Godhead; and, only in the Son, who stooped to "come down from heaven" and be here a Man upon earth, is the Father to be seen. "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save He which is of God, He hath seen the Father." Infinite distinction between this blessed Son of man and all men on the earth, whither in grace He had humbled Himself to come. He had seen the Father. In the depths of that eternity in which the Word had been "with God," in which the "eternal life" was "with the Father," had He, who now humbly speaks of Himself as "He which is of God," "seen" what no creature can - "seen the Father." What unfathomable secrets of love and blessedness and glory are wrapped up in these short simple words!

Tread softly, O my soul, for surely this is holy ground. And here He was, He who had seen the Father, He was here to make Him known. He had become incarnate for this very end. He had taken flesh, came down from heaven, or He would still equally with the Father have been beyond the ken of mortals, beyond the creature's sight. "No man hath seen God at any time the Only Begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Who else could? And how else could we ever have known Him? How else could the light of the Father's love and grace have beamed into our dark hearts, and shed its lustre on our whole upward path to the abodes of which the Saviour afterwards said, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you." When there with our adorable Jesus, and privileged to behold His glory, how will there be connected therewith the witness of what He had known and enjoyed there from all eternity! "For thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

From these depths He returns, and with what perfect ease and grace, to the simplest presentation of Himself as the bread of life. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life."

How simple the way in which the Saviour is received! Just as a hungry man, with bread before him, asks no questions, makes no demur, but eats and lives, so the Saviour, with a hungry soul before Him, needs nothing to commend Him to such a soul's grateful, adoring reception. But where are such? Alas! it was the lack of all taste for Christ, the self-complacency which felt no need of Him, that prevented these blinded Jews from receiving Him. And where is there an appetite for Him now? Precious bread of life He doubtless is — perfectly adapted to nourish and sustain divine life in man, even if that life be in its most infantile stage, the very earliest moments of its communication by grace to the soul.

But without this what is there? Death! A corpse has no appetite — it neither hungers nor thirsts. No more does the soul that is still dead in sins, dead to God. It is of the woman who seeks her happiness on earth that the word is spoken, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. 5: 6), but it would surely be as true to say that *he* who thus lives is also dead.

Dear reader, if fashion, wealth, or pleasure — the world in any of its forms — be all we wish, all we seek, what can the bread of life be to us in that state? Insipid and distasteful indeed in our esteem! Christ will not help us to win the prize in any race of ambition or pursuit of pleasure. He who passed by the nature of angels, and all the gradations of human rank, to be known on earth, as these Jews tauntingly designated Him, "the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know"; or as some in Mark 6: 3, "Is not this the carpenter?" — He is not one in whom pride can find its food. And as to pleasure, what can they who seek it find in the One "who pleased not Himself" — who tells us in this very chapter, "For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me"?

And yet, solemnly as the fact begins to declare itself, that between this incarnate One and those who surrounded Him there was not one thought, feeling, or motive in common, how graciously He continues to urge every consideration which might be adapted to produce in them an appetite to awaken desires after Himself, the Living Bread! They had referred to the manna, and covertly to Moses as the giver of it, in order to depreciate Christ. He returns to that subject now, to press on their attention the contrast for themselves. "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever." Wondrous words! The manna, testimony as it was of God's power and grace, and type indeed of Christ Himself, in its actual use did but nourish for a few years that poor, fleeting, feverish, forfeited life, which begins at our birth and ends at our death. A taper wasting from the moment it begins to shine; "a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" — is it for this, or the support of it, or for the brief pleasure that it affords, that men toil, fret, weary themselves, despise heaven with all its glories, refuse or neglect Christ and His great salvation?

Yes. It was so in our Lord's day on earth. It is so still. Oh that His words (thank God, "they are spirit and they are life") may reach the heart of some one who cons these pages — the words in which He contrasts with everything in this poor, perishable life, that interminable existence in unutterable peace and joy, that "everlasting life" which all receive who receive Him! Hungry soul, can you not feed on Jesus? As you would appease your natural hunger on the suited food, can you not find in Jesus what meets your entire case, what satisfies your every wish? Here is an undying life — an unwasting one; to "live for ever" is the effect of feeding on this bread from heaven. "That a man may eat thereof and not die: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever." Has the worldling anything to compare with this? Do his most feverish dreams of happiness on earth embrace the element of unending continuance? It is just for him the one element wanting, the lack of which spoils all the rest.

How passing wonderful, that the One who stood before these Jews as the lowliest and poorest of men had the full consciousness then of having a life to bestow, to communicate, which death cannot touch, and which is, in its own proper nature, everlasting life! He is no longer here

in humiliation, speaking such words of grace and truth as these; but He has not ceased to be the giver of this life, Himself the fulness of the life He gives. "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him."

To gather up a little what has been under review, we have here "the Son of man," One who is really partaker of flesh and blood, a Man conversing with the men who had followed Him across the lake — we have this Son of man, the Sealed One of God the Father. He is the Sent One too, and the first thing for any one who would please God is to believe on Him whom He hath sent. He has, moreover, meat or food to give, which endures to everlasting life. In the conversation with the parties just adverted to, the mystery of His presence here is declared, and many of the moral traits of that life of which He is the full expression, and which He was here to communicate, are either stated in words, or come out in practical display. He was from heaven, the incarnate One. He was the Father's gift, a character in which He delights in this Gospel to speak of Himself. He was the true bread — the real and only nourishment for divine life in man, had it only been there.

What perfect adaptation to man's need is this bread from heaven. He who is that bread gives life, moreover, as well as sustains it where it is. But where is it, alas! save as sovereignly bestowed, when all would equally have treated it with disdain? They had seen Him and had not believed. There is the heartiest welcome, an open door, none refused; he Who comes is no more to hunger, he who believes is no more to thirst; but the Saviour has to take refuge from universal rejection by mankind in the certainty that all would come to Him who were given to Him of the Father. The outflow of His own love in receiving all such, and casting none out who come, is thus seen as the perfection of obedience to His Father, whose will, not His own, He had come from heaven to do. How the heart bows in contemplation of such obedience! He who could speak of raising up His people at the last day as though it were as easy and simple an act of obedience as any that He performed while here, speaks of Himself as having it in charge not to stop short of this. "This is the Father's will . . . that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."

Blessed Jesus, how safe, to be confided thus to Thee! But more than this, this safety appertains to all who see Him and believe on Him, "the last Adam, a quickening Spirit." Though it may be of His resurrection-place that this is spoken, such is the fulness of life in His person that the eye that rests on Him receives, with the beams of His countenance, that life which these beams impart. To believe on Him is to have everlasting life. The drawings of the Father, His secret teachings, secure that they shall come to Him who are the gift to Him of the Father's love. The Father Himself, undisclosed save to the Son ("He who is of God"), draws to the Son by that sense of need which is met by Him alone. He is the bread of life — not a perishable life like that of which even the manna in the desert was the food — but everlasting life.

What unfathomable wonders these few verses disclose! The infinite grace displayed in the fact of the incarnation — how little is it pondered by our careless, frivolous hearts! And then the perfectness of this blessed One in the place of humiliation to which He had stooped — the absoluteness of His obedience, and the delicacy of His self-hiding, self-consuming service! To these Jews He had to speak of Himself, for they challenged His claims, and invidiously compared Him with Moses, and His miracle with that of the manna. He answers as feeling the

reflection on His Father, not on Himself. "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." Blessed Saviour! grant us daily and hourly to feed by faith on Thyself in all the perfectness in which Thou wast displayed to the eye of God while sojourning in this vale of tears.

But our attention is claimed by deeper wonders still. The incarnation is one marvel and mystery and glory of the gospel, the cross is the other. Any third miracle to compare with these the records of eternity afford not. There has been none such in eternity past; there can be none such in eternity to come. The Word made flesh! The Holy One made sin! But why was this? Was it not enough that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him? Had this been all, not one sinner of Adam's race would have been found on high to sing the praises of his Saviour-God. Christ the incarnate Word, had there been no deeper mystery of love, would have shown, more than anything beside, man's hatred to God, and the utter hopelessness of his case. The blessed One well knew this when He came into the world, but now the proof was before His eyes. The more His intrinsic excellence, His moral perfectness was displayed, the more manifest it became that between Him and fallen man there was not one moral quality in common.

It is not, as others have observed, a question of degree, a race in which one immeasurably outdistances another. No; it is contrariety — contrast — of the most absolute kind. All that men value and seek He declined and shunned. For all on which His heart was set they had no relish whatever. Men seek their own glory; He sought His Father's alone. Men do their own will; His Father's was His only business. Men love those who resemble themselves, and such as love them; He loved where there were no qualities He could approve, and where there was hatred to Himself that thirsted for His blood. To think of One who for the three and thirty years of His sojourn on earth never did one thing to serve Himself, spare Himself, exalt Himself, but for every moment of His life was and *did*, spake and *thought* and *felt*, exactly as the Father would have Him! Let a man's eyes be opened, as they are when his ears are unstopped by the voice of God's Son; let his opened eyes rest on THIS BLESSED PERSON as the divine records set Him forth, and what is the result? "Woe is me," he exclaims, "I am utterly hopeless now! Hard and vain have been my struggles to win life by keeping the law; but now, as I look on this moral picture, every trait, every line, convicts me of being exactly the opposite. I admire His ways, I could sit and gaze on Him and wonder; and if I could be like him — alas! every attempt deepens my conviction that it is all in vain. If Christ be what God delights in — and He is — He never can delight in me, for His ways and mine are farther than east and west asunder. What is to become of me, wretched man that I am?"

What, indeed, must have become of any of us, had Christ only glorified His Father in coming down to sojourn here as a living man? But this was not the whole; He Himself assures us it was not. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

As come down, as incarnate, He was the bread of God, His Father's gift; but there was bread which He Himself would give, even His flesh, which He would give for the life of the world. Now this giving of His flesh was the laying down of His life, the yielding Himself up to

death, that He might become to sinners — to fallen, perishing men — what bread would be to a crowd of persons perishing with hunger.

It is in a *slain* Christ alone that sinners can now find what meets their deep and solemn need. Well may our need be met where God has been perfectly glorified about our sins! Convicted, by His life, of total contrariety to Him in every moral trait, whither shall we turn but to the cross, where this same blessed One gives His flesh that we may live?

Did His love go even to such lengths as these? It did. When nothing less than the death of a sin-atoning victim of infinite value could meet our need as guilty ones exposed to the wrath of God, or justify God in justifying us, His love was found equal to the emergency, and He gave His flesh for the life of the world.

That such is His meaning comes out more emphatically in His reply to the next cavil of those who stood round about Him. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" was their carnal, foolish inquiry. He stops not to explain, but repeats and amplifies His previous declaration. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." Evidently, for the blood to be apart from the flesh, so as to speak of eating the one and drinking the other, the blood must have been shed in death. So that we have here, in the fullest way, the death of Christ, the shedding of His blood, set forth; and, at the same time, the most solemn testimony of ITS ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL, and of the equally absolute necessity for ITS INDIVIDUAL RECEPTION. "Except ye *eat* the flesh of the Son of man, and *drink* his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." Who besides could have thus provided for our perishing souls? What other life would have had in it the atoning value, the saving efficacy, at once to meet the highest claim of God's moral glory, the glory of all His perfections, and reach down to the lowest depths of our need as guilty, ruined, hopelessly undone sinners?

And yet it is as Son of man that He here speaks of Himself. How could He have suffered death had He not become the Son of man? How this links together the mysteries of Bethlehem and Calvary, the Incarnation and the Cross! The one was in order to the other. He came to die. "Once, in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." It was "for the suffering of death" that He was "made a little lower than the angels." And it is by His death we live.

Though He had life in Himself, and though, anticipatively of His atoning work, He gave life at any time to any poor sinner, it was only on the ground of that work that life could flow from His person to any who heard His voice and believed His words while here; and the actual shedding of His blood as that of the great and all-atoning Victim for our sins, was the only way in which the flood-gates of mercy could be thrown open to guilty, justly condemned sinners. How widely they are flung open now! How completely has Christ's precious sacrifice removed all the obstacles to our salvation presented by the character of God, His holy nature, the majesty of His throne, and the faithfulness of His word! "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness"; and while this perfection might surely have been displayed in the endless punishment of the whole guilty race, how then would the love of God have been exercised or shown? Where is that love

so manifested as at the cross? and where besides is God seen as so inexorably just? The flames of hell are not so glorious a vindication of His righteous claims as the agonies of His spotless, immaculate Son. God's holy hatred of sin could not go further than the averting His countenance from the Son of His love when drinking the cup for us.

Who will not tremble before this holy Lord God, who, sooner than tarnish His throne, or break the word which had gone out of His mouth, that sin should have death for its righteous punishment, gave up to death — the death of the cross — the One who had been in His bosom from all eternity? And then to think of that One voluntarily yielding up His life? In obedience to His Father and in love to us He drinks the cup of wrath, that in Him, the Slain One, we perishing sinners may find all we need. Life flows to us through His death; and the soul that finds its hunger appeased and its thirst quenched by what Scripture tells of Christ on the cross, has not only life in Him, eternal life, issuing in the resurrection of life at the last day, but a present fulness of nutriment and refreshing, of which the Saviour witnesses in the words, "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." Continuing to feed on Him as the slain as well as the incarnate Christ, we abide in Him and He in us. "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him."

This language assumes, though it does not mention the fact, that He who used it would rise again. And with Christ as risen, they who feed on Him as slain, are so identified that He here for the first time in Scripture speaks of our dwelling in Him and He in us. Dwelling in Him we participate in all that is His; and by His dwelling in us we become vessels for the manifestation of what He is.

Nor is this the whole. Christ's own life as the Son of man was a life of entire dependence on the Father. And ours is one of dependence on Christ Himself. But the one is presented as the model for the other. "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by\* the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by\* me." Blessed Jesus, teach us thus to live in hourly dependence on Thyself! It is at this point that the Saviour sums up the whole subject of which He had been treating. "This is that bread which came down from heaven; not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead; he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

\* διὰ τὸν πατέρα more accurately rendered "on account of the Father," i.e., by reason of what the Father is and His living.

But the native sphere and home of this undying life is not earth but heaven. To all intents it is an exotic here. Perfectly was it manifested in the three and thirty years' sojourn on earth of the Son of man; and, as we have seen, this display of divine life in man, in the person of Christ, is one great leading subject of this Gospel. But the One in whom this display took place was a stranger here. The Book witnesses this fact throughout. We have not far to read before we find the words, "And the light shineth in darkness: and the darkness comprehended it not." And then more plainly still, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." Even His own people, the Israel of Jehovah's choice, had, as we have also so largely seen in this very chapter, no heart for Jesus. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Thus rejected by those among whom He came, He makes no secret of whence He had come. To Nicodemus He says, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye

believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" Who so competent to tell as He to whom these things were familiar, and the mystery of whose Person still made heaven His home, though as man He had come to sojourn below? "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." Such were His own words to the Jewish rabbi; while in the same chapter (John 3), the Holy Ghost by the Evangelist's pen delightedly bears witness to Him as the heavenly Stranger here. "He that *cometh from above* is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that *cometh from heaven* is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth." Alas that He has to add, "And no man receiveth his testimony"!

Our own chapter bears abundant witness to His having come down from heaven. This was what so provoked the opposition of the Jews; an opposition which became so open and so fully declared as to force from the Saviour's lips the most solemn statements as to the contrast between their origin and the sphere whence He had come. "And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above; ye are of this world; I am not of this world" (John 8). No; He was from heaven. A true, real Man; veritably partaker with the children, blessed be God, of flesh and blood; partaker, as He has been telling us, of a life which He would give in the shedding of His blood, that there might be the link between Him and all who receive Him of an undying life. But all this could not constitute Him a native of this world, a denizen of the earth. He was a stranger here; and when many of His disciples began to say inwardly to themselves, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" He, knowing their thoughts, replied, "Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? "

Thus does He give, somewhat obscurely indeed, as suggesting much more than was spoken, the first intimation of the third great fact of which our chapter is the witness. Christ incarnate, and thus come down from heaven; Christ slain, His blood shed for sinful men, becoming the suited food of a life, the first movement of which in us is in the sense of our need as sinners, a hunger which can only thus be appeased; and now Christ ascended, involving of necessity His resurrection, but including much more than this. The eternal life which was with the Father before all worlds — the eternal, uncreated, all-creating Word which "in the beginning" was "with God" and "was God" — had come down, and become in that act of deep humiliation "the Son of man." He was now returning to that sphere of unmingled blessedness, of highest glory, whence He had come forth to Bethlehem's manger and Calvary's cross; but He was returning thither as Son of man. Thenceforth He should be seated as man on the throne of His Father. Heaven, not earth, becomes thus, from the moment of His session there, the home of all who, by eating His flesh and drinking His blood, become partakers of His life. Earth becomes a wilderness, a place of exile, to all such, just as it was to Him while here. He is our life, and this associates us necessarily with heaven and all that is native to that abode of purity and joy. As another once remarked, "If sin has opened to man the place of woe never designed for him but for the devil and his angels, grace has opened to him that heaven which is peculiarly and distinctively the dwelling-place of God." "The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; but the earth hath he given to the children of men." So the Psalmist wrote, and such indeed was the only inheritance which could have descended to us, even from unfallen Adam. The earth was given to him (Gen. 1), but when his sin had opened hell to the finally impenitent and unbelieving, grace opened heaven to all who become willing to enter there in the value of Christ's blessed Person and atoning work.

What He but obscurely hints to His disciples in our chapter has since become accomplished fact, and one of the great foundation-facts of Christianity. Christ has gone up on high. The Son of man has ascended up where He was before. His request to His Father (John 17) has been fulfilled. "And now, O Father, glorify thou me, with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Nor would He be there alone. "Father, I will [or, desire] that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." Heaven is now the revealed home and sphere of that eternal life which, if absolutely and perfectly displayed on earth in the One of whom we read, "In him was life," is also derivatively enjoyed by all who believe. "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?"

It was for other lips and another pen than the beloved disciple's to unfold this subject in detail. The place in heaven in and with Christ, bestowed on believers by the grace which reigns through righteousness by our Lord Jesus Christ, is Paul's distinctive theme. The manifestation of divine life on earth, perfectly in Christ, and really though derivatively in us, is the theme of John's Gospel and Epistles. It is, of all themes, the most vital, essential, fundamental. But deeply interesting it is to find such links as our Lord's words last quoted, and those from John 17: 24, evincing that whether Paul or Peter or John be the instrument of communication, it is one vast circle of truth which is revealed, of which the centre and fulness are found in the Person and Sacrifice and Exaltation of the Son of God and Son of man; Christ, the Word incarnate, Christ slain, Christ ascended; "a full Christ for empty sinners."

Many who had for a season followed Christ drew back from the time when this discourse was delivered. This did not surprise Him; but it afforded Him the occasion of challenging the hearts of those who still surrounded Him. To them Jesus said, "Will ye also go away?" No one wonders that Peter was spokesman for them all; and he might not yet have measured himself, as afterwards through grace he did when he went out and wept bitterly. Nevertheless there is a warmth, an energy, a decision about his words that we may well covet, and as to which we may challenge our hearts, dear Christian reader, whether we could reply thus. Go away! "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

May our hearts rebel thus, and disown, every thought of any other than this blessed Christ of God. "To whom shall we go?" To whom indeed? Oh, to abide in Him! May we have grace to cleave to Him with purpose of heart, and may He be glorified in each of us, for His Name's sake. Amen. W. T.