

Not only "Good" but "The better."

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Man is naturally incredulous in the things of God. It was the first form of Satan's attack upon Eve, to infuse questions as to His being the Source of all good to man; and want of faith in God's wisdom, God's ways, and God's means, still hinders the most pious and earnest souls. We propose to ourselves a certain way in which He will work, and are greatly taken by surprise when He works in another way.

To look for Israel's Messiah, in Jerusalem, in the Temple, with pomp and glory and power, — this Nathanael could understand. To see the high orders, the prelates and princes, the influential among the nation, urging His presence and His claim, — this was to be expected. To have Him overthrow Caesar's power, assume the crown, and rule in equity and peace, — this surely was the hope of the nation.

Hence when Philip found Nathanael and told him they had found the One they awaited, even Jesus of Nazareth, **Nathaniel said unto him, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see."** (John 1: 46).

But **Nazareth!** A place not so much as named in the Old Testament; and again in **Galilee;** and yet again, a village so usually unproductive of good that it had quite an ill-savour among those who knew it; for Nazareth to be the home of Israel's Saviour, seemed to tax Nathanael's mind almost to refusal. Happy he to have a friend like Philip whose wise rejoinder led him to come and see. Was he disappointed? Does God ever disappoint the man or the woman who is content to receive and learn Christ in the unexpected place?

Do we sometimes decide for ourselves that Christ is to appear to us as the Saviour, or as the Leader, in some stately building worthy of the occasion, or by the sanction of some ecclesiastical hand, or by some special form of service? Is not the Lord whom we so truly seek in some nearer' some insignificant place, void of all religious import according to man's ideas?

Or do we not hope for some general, popular move, in favour of Christ; a religious upheaval into which one can slip without being singular, avoiding the sterner discipline of individual conviction and the courage to act upon it? Yet is not the Jesus whom we seek rather the Jesus of Nazareth, to whom one and another, sinking all prejudice, attracted by the pure grace of His Person apart from all outside show, are irresistibly drawn? If attached to the stately temple ritual man may have visits from the Lord, but His company is found with those who are the poor and afflicted remnant of His people whose only home is His presence, and whose only lure is His company. He satisfieth the longing soul.

Good did indeed come out of Nazareth in the person of Jesus, but when we pass into John's second chapter we meet with not only the positive — **good**, but that which is **better**, for the wine given by Jesus was better than man's wine. Probably at the wedding feast here spoken of, the rule had been followed, and the bridegroom had given, according to his means, the very best wine first; but the expert who presided at this feast immediately detected the quality of what was now set before him, though ignorant of its miraculous source, and chided with him, saying, "**Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.**" (John 2: 10). But with Jesus as our Friend, do we not always find things better as we go on?

The Spirit of Christ in the prophets led them to speak of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow. The Lord Jesus in grace walked the path of lowliness and humiliation, enjoying therein His Father's smile and communion with Him, and then entered into glory. At the close of His stay on earth He bore our sins and their judgment, but is risen to die no more. In glorious resurrection, made the centre of all glories, He will receive His Church, and His Kingdom and will bring out all the counsels of the Father's heart on an unshakeable basis for eternity. Truly in His case the best wine is last.

It is so with His people. Even here, and despite all weakness, suffering, persecution, isolation, we taste the sweetness of Christ's love, the sense of His approval, and communion with God. We have the joy of our relationship with the Father, the friendly power of the Holy Ghost who dwells within us, the precious privilege of the Lord's communications to us by the Holy Scriptures. We have even here the glad reality of the Lord's supper, the rare delight of worship in the Father's presence, and the happy service of the Lord toward His people, and in the world of need around. Ours is the luxury on earth of going to its dark places as dispensers of the bounty of God, with forgiveness for the guilty, life for the dead, rest for the weary, peace and satisfaction for all. The wine is good to begin with.

But the best wine is to come. We shall see His face whom not having seen we love; ours will be the joy of beholding His glory so as we have seen it in the sanctuary. Testimony, service, suffering in His Name, are all sweeter than the honeycomb; but to be with Christ is **far** better. Eternity is not to be for the saint a Sphinx-like fixture, but a flowing, an ever expanding, **life**; where the glory of God, and the grace of Christ, are by the Spirit, to be our joy; and His service our unwearying delight.