

Christ the Way

John 14: 6

W. Kelly.

This was a momentous word for man — for every man, woman, and child. No words more encouraging were ever uttered, even by the Lord Jesus Himself, for such as felt the need of divine direction.

I have no doubt that there was more in them than the mere answer to the question. They meet the need not of one man only, but of all. Yet our Lord was not addressing a multitude of hearers, but the perplexed disciples; and this gives a definiteness of application. He is addressing a believer under Jewish prejudice, not an unconverted man. Not that I am going to confine myself to its strict bearing on the enquiring disciples, for there is in it the fullest answer to the darkest heart. There is divine help for those who know really but very partially. Their knowledge was scanty; they were not the wise and prudent of the earth; and Scripture takes pains to show this. They were not chosen for anything in themselves. It was manifest that they could add no lustre to the gospel. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1: 26-29).

Thus does God confound the pride of flesh, and show the utter folly of any pretension on man's part to worth in the things of God, seeing that he is really nothing but a lost sinner. When Thomas asked the question about the way, the thoughts of the disciples were still hampered by the earthly expectation of Israel. But how different was their condition in little more than a month afterwards! We do not hear again of Thomas. May it not have been because he was going on well? In that case there is not much to talk about. It is people's intrigues and ambitious designs, their quarrels and fights, that make up the most of history, man's attempts to circumvent or repel evil, sometimes successful, more often failing. It is the constant conflict of evil with good; and evil but too often prosperous. The time will come when good will always triumph; but it is not come yet. A poor thing truly is man — the world. No wonder that God's thoughts find their centre in one person; and He is the object of God here and everywhere.

One person was always before the mind of God, and this was expressed thousands of years before He became a man. He was not only perfection, but He was the perfect Man, as well as God come down to deliver those who were most opposite to Him in every way. Here we see divine good in a man, and nowhere else. No man can be a Christian who refuses Him, or takes any other way. On the one hand, were He not God it would take away from God's glory as well as destroy man's hopes. He could not else have been the perfect Saviour and Deliverer. On the other hand, it would have taken away all the means of our blessedness if He had not deigned to become man. But He who was God became man, is so now, and ever will so abide, though infinitely more than man. It is just as true that He is always God, even on the cross; and this is the pledge of sure and stable blessing for every soul who would hide himself by faith in Him, spite of all his sins.

Have you fled for refuge? Have you thus come to Him? Or are you thinking to try and make yourself a little better first? But remember, salvation is for sinners. He does not want people who are good (not that He could find them if He did); He is come to seek and to save the lost. It is they who

need Him. Are you willing to take this place? It is a solemn thing to tell out all our sins to God; it is as much as to confess that one deserves hell-fire. Do not draw back when I press this. Does it make any difference to God's thought of you? He knows it all before; but for you it is all-important to take the place of good-for-nothingness in His presence. Thomas was slow to believe; and so are very many. No man likes to tell out what he really is, but when he does he finds out what God is, and He is love. Indeed grace, and grace alone and exactly, meets the need of him who finds out that he is nothing but a sinner. It will not do to say in a general way, "Ah, yes, we are all sinners." I must have to do with God about my own sins, and that in a particular way. It is neither faith nor conscience to deal with them all in a lump as it were. Do not tell me that you have done so; that you have been to God about your sins and come away empty. You deceive yourself as to this.

You have not been simple or truthful in telling out what you are, else you would have found all you want to meet your need in the Lord Jesus. His fulness meets all our wants. Could I say less when it is about Jesus? He did not come to limit Himself to any one people, or country, or age. His grace flows out freely to all. It is no longer only Israel, but any sinner at any time. When John said, "Behold the Lamb of God," what was the effect? He tells us: "which taketh away the sin of the world." Accordingly this is what the work of the Lord Jesus will accomplish; no particle of sin or of its effects will be left in the world. But that day is not come yet. Before it can come the wicked must be banished, that they may go to their own place. No man will be condemned merely because he is bad, but because he refuses the grace of God as shown in Christ. Wrath then comes on him for all his sins. The promise of salvation is to him who hears the word of God — the gospel; and man is condemned because he refuses God's remedy in it. Do not you then lose your time, and it may be your soul, in troubling yourself about God's dealings with the heathen. The Lord will judge them; and He will do His work perfectly. What you want yourself is mercy, forgiveness, salvation. Therefore, I pray you, banish all thoughts of your own on such a subject; you do not and cannot yet understand God's ways. Venture not to sit in judgment on Him.

There is nothing so presumptuous and inconsistent as unbelief, nothing so humble as faith. So those who would not scruple to discuss and condemn God's dealings with the heathen, count it the height of presumption on a believer's part to say, "I know I am forgiven, washed perfectly white, and free from all stain." Yet this confidence is from nothing in themselves; it is founded simply on faith in the efficacy of Christ's blood. It is due to what Christ has done, not to what we are. A man who knows he is a sinner gladly owns the Saviour. His first desire is that he may be brought to God. How is he to get to Him? Here is our Lord's answer, "I am the way." Let us consider then a little what "the way" means in Scripture.

When man was first made, he was not as he is now. God made man upright. He was the most wonderful being that God had made. An infidel may talk (and there is plenty of such talk in these days) of man having grown gradually to the state he is now in, that he came into existence of himself, nobody knows how, out of nobody knows what. And this is science! Nothing is so utterly foolish as unbelief. But supposing the protoplasm was seaweed, we have still the difficulty, How did the seaweed come? and how did it so change? The very least object could not have come into being without the will and power of God.

But wonderful as the power of God in His works may be, and the more as we think truly of all He has made, much the most wonderful is man even now, though fallen; for he is still responsible as the image of God, if not His likeness. And this is why murder can only be wiped out by death; for man has destroyed the image of God in another. Yet there has never been a good man born into this world.

Man was originally made in the likeness of God, but Adam was fallen before his firstborn child appeared. Thus sin had come in, and so even Seth was born in Adam's "likeness," though in God's "image" still. A brute has not a reasonable soul. Man is the only one of all God's creatures here who is thus endowed. We therefore see that God did not make the world or man as we see them now; for, when they came from His hand there was not a single thing that He did not pronounce good, or very good. Then there was no need of a way, for whether man turned to the right or to the left, all was good; and there could be no need yet to say, "This is the way; walk ye in it."

The use and importance of a way would be when that which may have been good everywhere is so no longer. Evil has come in, and the world has become a wilderness. Such being the case, there is no way; and we need one. The world is nothing but a waste and howling wilderness, through which we cannot pass without a way. There is no rest here, nothing to satisfy the heart of man. He may seek to take his fill of the pleasures of the world; it is but a dram to render him insensible to the fact that he is miserable at the thought of facing God. Having a bad conscience through his sins, there is no one he would so like to get away from as God. He has perhaps some fear of Satan, but he is not so afraid of him as he is of God. What does this tell? That he is a sinner away from God. It is the sense of sin that makes him afraid. The same terrible being (Satan) first entraps a man into sin, and then whispers that he is done for; first entices, and then gives a sense of God's judgment against him. Man then tries to drown his fears in pleasure. He will go anywhere, do anything, to get rid of the pressure of sin; he will occupy himself with, it may be, his family, his business, even his duties, as he calls them — anything that will keep him away from God. Then, it may be, he is laid on a sick bed, and he feels, "I must meet God in my sins"; and some especially come up to mind that had been long forgotten, but ah! none forgiven. For you cannot be forgiven a little here and a little there. Sin is not to be got rid of in this fashion, one at a time, perhaps when you feel sorry about it. Whatever they may say who sell masses, it is not so with God. But when and how does He meet this ruined condition? Man is lost, and the world is as much of a wilderness as the sands of Arabia to a traveller who has missed his way. Man has absolutely no resources as regards his sins. What then is to meet him in his need? Trying to make amends will not avail. Your sins are upon you, and what can you do when they confront you in the light of God's throne?

But how does God meet your need? Jesus says, "I am the way." Jesus is the Way, the only way to God the Father. Jesus is the Way in this world of utter alienation and departure from God. Man is the head of all the ruin as he is the head of the creation. Adam was the head of all before Eve was given to him; he had called all the creatures by their names. Eve's place was in association with him. So the church has no claim but by association with Christ. He is the way; and can this way fail? Christ fail! What folly! He is the Way. I have nothing to do but to take the way. Crowds of different cases come, and no wonder; for no one that came ever went away as he came. Nor did Christ ever send a soul away unblessed — none that came as sinners and lost.

This is what man really is, a sinner ruined and lost. He has no resources towards God; he cannot diminish one of his sins. What is to become of him? Jesus says, "I am the way," and it is sure, unfailing. The Son of God became a man in order that He might be the Way. He came to be a Saviour, but a Saviour only to those who believe. He will be Judge of those who reject Him. He has other offices too, but they are mostly connected with salvation. A man who will be saved is not brought into judgment. Men who have life and are saved have no sins upon them. How then and for what are they to be judged? "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life" (John 5: 24). The word really is judgment, not "condemnation," as it is translated in the A.V.

I do not wish to find fault with our translation, but let me prove that the word ought to be "judgment." "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment." Here the very same word that is translated "condemnation" is used. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Here it is another word; and there is just as much difference in the words used in the Greek as in the English. What God declares is, that he that hears His word has everlasting life. It is a present thing. The believer again is passed from death unto life. What would be the sense of judging life, of judging what God has wrought?

But all men will give account of their deeds. We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." This is a very different thing from being brought into judgment by God. To be judged, a man must be a criminal. It is not always the case when there is an earthly judge, for if the grand jury bring in a true bill, the man, even if innocent, must be brought before the judge, and might even be condemned; but this would be caused by man's infirmity. There could be no such thought in connection with divine judgment. No believer ever comes into judgment, speaking now of the judgment of the great white throne; and this because he has eternal life, and his sins are forgiven now. Are you rejecting this salvation?

God is now in Christ beseeching, entreating you to be reconciled on the ground of His acceptance of Him who was made sin. Your rejecting Him proves that you are not willing to be saved. He is ready to save you, to pardon here and now. But you have some secret reserve, something you are keeping back from Him. You either wish to serve sin a little longer, or you do not believe that God is as good as He is. You prove that you judge yourself unworthy of eternal life.

No man is saved because he deserves it. I implore you, put it not off, wait not for anything. Christ will not be more of a Saviour tomorrow; and are you sure that you will hear His voice tomorrow? Is it not to be feared that you will be less and less inclined to receive Him? He is the Way and the only way. When we get to heaven we shall not need a way, any more than it was necessary in Eden. All is right there, and no way will be required above. When in heaven there will no longer be responsibility. Here it brings danger, failure, ruin; for now, on the' ground of responsibility, as a man, you are lost altogether.

Henceforth it is really a question of faith. Do I rest on Christ, believing in Him? I learn that He has undertaken for me, that God has given me a Saviour, and that He commands me to repent and take the place of one that is lost. When a man tries to become religious, he is denying that he is lost; he sets himself to read and pray, to work out righteousness for himself. He says, David prayed three times a day, and I will pray four times; but will it help him? Do I think lightly of prayer? By no means, but when a man acts like this, he shows that he does not know his sinfulness and lost estate.

Suppose the case of one guilty of high treason and condemned to die. The king might say, "I know the man is guilty, but in my sovereign mercy I grant him a free pardon if he will only come and avail himself of it." But the man obstinately refuses to come out; he will not credit such goodness, and the king orders the sentence to be carried out. So it is with man. He refuses to believe that God is willing to save, and why? Because he judges of God by himself.

Faith is sure of God as He reveals Himself; and He is not only willing, but He can afford righteously, to save. God saves on the ground of Christ's redemption. It is not mere mercy. Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, for Christ was judged for our sins by God Himself on the cross. Hence He is righteous to forgive; for Christ has paid the penalty. God is not merely justified in forgiving, but glorified also. It brought far more glory to God than if He merely punished all as sinners; for every attribute of His is satisfied — His majesty, His love, His truth, His holiness. All the grace of

His character shines out for every soul that comes, bringing out more of the infinite worthiness of His Son.

Be afraid then to stay away from the Saviour of sinners, lest tomorrow find you in a more hardened state than today. All delays are dangerous; but what is so dangerous as to put off bowing to the Son and accepting God's free salvation?

W. K.