

1 Corinthians Exposition 1 - Maclaren

1 CORINTHIANS EXPOSITION: PART 1 of 4 ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt.D.

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CALLING ON THE NAME

'All that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.'—1 Corinthians 1:2.

There are some difficulties, with which I need not trouble you, about both the translation and the connection of these words. One thing is quite clear, that in them the Apostle associates the church at Corinth with the whole mass of Christian believers in the world. The question may arise whether he does so in the sense that he addresses his letter both to the church at Corinth and to the whole of the churches, and so makes it a catholic epistle. That is extremely unlikely, considering how all but entirely this letter is taken up with dealing with the especial conditions of the Corinthian church. Rather I should suppose that he is simply intending to remind 'the Church of God at Corinth ... sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints,' that they are in real, living union with the whole body of believers. Just as the water in a little land-locked bay, connected with the sea by some narrow strait like that at Corinth, is yet part of the whole ocean that rolls round the world, so that little community of Christians had its living bond of union with all the brethren in every place that called upon the name of Jesus Christ.

Whichever view on that detail of interpretation be taken, this phrase, as a designation of Christians, is worth considering. It is one of many expressions found in the New Testament as names for them, some of which have now dropped out of general use, while some are still retained. It is singular that the name of 'Christian,' which has all but superseded all others, was originally invented as a jeer by sarcastic wits at Antioch, and never appears in the New Testament, as a name by which believers called themselves. Important lessons are taught by these names, such as disciples, believers, brethren, saints, those of the way, and so on, each of which embodies some characteristic of a follower of Jesus. So this appellation in the text, 'those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,' may yield not unimportant lessons if it be carefully weighed, and to some of these I would ask your attention now.

I. First, it gives us a glimpse into the worship of the primitive Church.

To 'call on the name of the Lord' is an expression that comes straight out of the Old Testament. It means there distinctly adoration and invocation, and it means precisely these things when it is referred to Jesus Christ.

We find in the Acts of the Apostles that the very first sermon that was preached at Pentecost by Peter all turns upon this phrase. He quotes the Old Testament saying, 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,' and then goes on to prove that 'the Lord,' the 'calling on whose Name' is salvation, is Jesus Christ; and winds up with 'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.'

Again we find that Ananias of Damascus, when Jesus Christ appeared to him and told him to go to Paul and lay his hands upon him, shrank from the perilous task because Paul had been sent to 'bind them that call upon the name of the Lord,' and to persecute them. We find the same phrase recurring in other connections, so that, on the whole, we may take the expression as a recognised designation of Christians.

This was their characteristic, that they prayed to Jesus Christ. The very first word, so far as we know, that Paul ever heard from a Christian was, 'Lord Jesus! receive my spirit.' He heard that cry of calm faith which, when he heard it, would sound to him as horrible blasphemy from Stephen's dying lips. How little he dreamed that he himself was soon to cry to the same Jesus, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' and was in after-days to beseech Him thrice for deliverance, and to be answered by sufficient grace. How little he dreamed that, when his own martyrdom was near, he too would look to Jesus as Lord and righteous Judge, from whose hands all who loved His appearing should receive their crown! Nor only Paul directs desires and adoration to Jesus as Lord; the last words of Scripture are a cry to Him as Lord to come quickly, and an invocation of His 'grace' on all believing souls.

Prayer to Christ from the very beginning of the Christian Church was, then, the characteristic of believers, and He to whom they prayed, thus, from the beginning, was recognised by them as being a Divine Person, God manifest in the flesh.

The object of their worship, then, was known by the people among whom they lived. Singing hymns to Christus as a god is nearly all that the Roman proconsul in his well-known letter could find to tell his master of their worship. They were the worshippers—not merely the disciples—of one Christ. That was their peculiar distinction. Among the worshippers of the false gods they stood erect; before Him, and Him only, they bowed. In Corinth there was the polluted worship of Aphrodite and of Zeus. These men called not on the name of these lustful and stained deities, but on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And everybody knew whom they worshipped, and understood whose men they were. Is that true about us? Do we Christian men so habitually cultivate the remembrance of Jesus Christ, and are we so continually in the habit of invoking His aid, and of contemplating His blessed perfections and sufficiency, that every one who knew us would recognise us as meant by those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ?

If this be the proper designation of Christian people, alas! alas! for so many of the professing Christians of this day, whom neither bystanders nor themselves would think of as included in such a name!

Further, the connection here shows that the divine worship of Christ was universal among the churches. There was no 'place' where it was not practised, no community calling itself a church to whom He was not the Lord to be invoked and adored. This witness to

the early and universal recognition in the Christian communities of the divinity of our Lord is borne by an undisputedly genuine epistle of Paul's. It is one of the four which the most thorough-going destructive criticism accepts as genuine. It was written before the Gospels, and is a voice from the earlier period of Paul's apostleship. Hence the importance of its attestation to this fact that all Christians everywhere, both Jewish, who had been trained in strict monotheism, and Gentile, who had burned incense at many a foul shrine, were perfectly joined together in this, that in all their need they called on the name of Jesus Christ as Lord and brought to Him, as divine, adoration not to be rendered to any creatures. From the day of Pentecost onwards, a Christian was not merely a disciple, a follower, or an admirer, but a worshipper of Christ, the Lord.

II. We may see here an unfolding of the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

Note that solemn accumulation, in the language of my text, of all the designations by which He is called, sometimes separately and sometimes unitedly, the name of 'our Lord Jesus Christ.' We never find that full title given to Him in Scripture except when the writer's mind is labouring to express the manifoldness and completeness of our Lord's relations to men, and the largeness and sufficiency of the blessings which He brings. In this context I find in the first nine or ten verses of this chapter, so full is the Apostle of the thoughts of the greatness and wonderfulness of his dear Lord on whose name he calls, that six or seven times he employs this solemn, full designation.

Now, if we look at the various elements of this great name we shall get various aspects of the way in which calling on Christ is the strength of our souls.

'Call on the name of—the Lord.' That is the Old Testament Jehovah. There is no mistaking nor denying, if we candidly consider the evidence of the New Testament writings, that, when we read of Jesus Christ as 'Lord,' in the vast majority of cases, the title is not a mere designation of human authority, but is an attribution to Him of divine nature and dignity. We have, then, to ascribe to Him, and to call on Him as possessing, all which that great and incommunicable Name certified and sealed to the Jewish Church as their possession in their God. The Jehovah of the Old Testament is our Lord of the New. He whose being is eternal, underived, self-sufficing, self-determining, knowing no variation, no diminution, no age, He who is because He is and that He is, dwells in His fulness in our Saviour. To worship Him is not to divert worship from the one God, nor is it to have other gods besides Him. Christianity is as much monotheistic as Judaism was, and the law of its worship is the old law—Him only shalt thou serve. It is the divine will that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.

But what is it to call on the name of Jesus? That name implies all the sweetness of His manhood. He is our Brother. The name 'Jesus' is one that many a Jewish boy bore in our Lord's own time and before it; though, afterwards, of course, abhorrence on the part of the Jew and reverence on the part of the Christian caused it almost entirely to disappear. But at the time when He bore it it was as undistinguished a name as Simeon, or Judas, or any other of His followers' names. To call upon the name of Jesus means to realise and bring near to ourselves, for our consolation and encouragement, for our strength and peace, the blessed thought of His manhood, so really and closely knit to ours; to grasp the blessedness of the thought that He knows our frame because He Himself has worn it, and understands and pities our weakness, being Himself a man. To Him whom we adore as Lord we draw near in tenderer, but not less humble and prostrate, adoration as our brother when we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, and thus embrace as harmonious, and not contradictory, both the divinity of the Lord and the humanity of Jesus.

To call on the name of Christ is to embrace in our faith and to beseech the exercise on our behalf of all which Jesus is as the Messiah, anointed by God with the fulness of the Spirit. As such He is the climax, and therefore the close of all revelation, who is the long-expected fruition of the desire of weary hearts, the fulfilment, and therefore the abolition, of sacrifice and temple and priesthood and prophecy and all that witnessed for Him ere He came. We further call on the name of Christ the Anointed, on whom the whole fulness of the Divine Spirit dwelt in order that, calling upon Him, that fulness may in its measure be granted to us.

So the name of the Lord Jesus Christ brings to view the divine, the human, the Messiah, the anointed Lord of the Spirit, and Giver of the divine life. To call on His name is to be blessed, to be made pure and strong, joyous and immortal. 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe.' Call on His name in the day of trouble and ye shall be heard and helped.

III. Lastly, this text suggests what a Christian life should be.

We have already remarked that to call on the name of Jesus was the distinctive peculiarity of the early believers, which marked them off as a people by themselves. Would it be a true designation of the bulk of so-called Christians now? You do not object to profess yourself a Christian, or, perhaps, even to say that you are a disciple of Christ, or even to go the length of calling yourself a follower and imitator. But are you a worshipper of Him? In your life have you the habit of meditating on Him as Lord, as Jesus, as Christ, and of refreshing and gladdening dusty days and fainting strength by the living water, drawn from the one unending stream from these triple fountains? Is the invocation of His aid habitual with you?

There needs no long elaborate supplication to secure His aid. How much has been done in the Church's history by short bursts of prayer, as 'Lord, help me!' spoken or unspoken in the moment of extremity! 'They cried unto God in the battle.' They would not have

time for very lengthy petitions then, would they? They would not give much heed to elegant arrangement of them or suiting them to the canons of human eloquence. 'They cried unto God in the battle'; whilst the enemy's swords were flashing and the arrows whistling about their ears. These were circumstances to make a prayer a 'cry'; no composed and stately utterance of an elegantly modulated voice, nor a languid utterance without earnestness, but a short, sharp, loud call, such as danger presses from panting lungs and parched throats. Therefore the cry was answered, 'and He was entreated of them.' 'Lord, save us, we perish!' was a very brief prayer, but it brought its answer. And so we, in like manner, may go through our warfare and work, and day by day as we encounter sudden bursts of temptation may meet them with sudden jets of petition, and thus put out their fires. And the same help avails for long-continuing as for sudden needs. Some of us may have to carry lifelong burdens and to fight in a battle ever renewed. It may seem as if our cry was not heard, since the enemy's assault is not weakened, nor our power to beat it back perceptibly increased. But the appeal is not in vain, and when the fight is over, if not before, we shall know what reinforcements of strength to our weakness were due to our poor cry entering into the ears of our Lord and Brother. No other 'name' is permissible as our plea or as recipient of our prayer. In and on the name of the Lord we must call, and if we do, anything is possible rather than that the promise which was claimed for the Church and referred to Jesus, in the very first Christian preaching on Pentecost, should not be fulfilled—'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

'In every place.' We may venture to subject the words of my text to a little gentle pressure here. The Apostle only meant to express the universal characteristics of Christians everywhere. But we may venture to give a different turn to the words, and learn from them the duty of devout communion with Christ as a duty for each of us wherever we are. If a place is not fit to pray in it is not fit to be in. We may carry praying hearts, remembrances of the Lord, sweet, though they may be swift and short, contemplations of His grace, His love, His power, His sufficiency, His nearness, His punctual help, like a hidden light in our hearts, into all the dusty ways of life, and in every place call on His name. There is no place so dismal but that thoughts of Him will make sunshine in it; no work so hard, so commonplace, so prosaic, so uninteresting, but that it will become the opposite of all these if whatever we do is done in remembrance of our Lord. Nothing will be too hard for us to do, and nothing too bitter for us to swallow, and nothing too sad for us to bear, if only over all that befalls us and all that we undertake and endeavour we make the sign of the Cross and call upon the name of the Lord. If 'in every place' we have Him as the object of our faith and desire, and as the Hearer of our petition, in 'every place' we shall have Him for our help, and all will be full of His bright presence; and though we have to journey through the wilderness we shall ever drink of that spiritual rock that will follow us, and that Rock is Christ. In every place call upon His name, and every place will be a house of God, and a gate of heaven to our waiting souls.

PERISHING OR BEING SAVED

'For the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.'—1 Corinthians 1:18.

The starting-point of my remarks is the observation that a slight variation of rendering, which will be found in the Revised Version, brings out the true meaning of these words. Instead of reading 'them that perish' and 'us which are saved,' we ought to read 'them that *are perishing*,' and 'us which *are being saved*.' That is to say, the Apostle represents the two contrasted conditions, not so much as fixed states, either present or future, but rather as processes which are going on, and are manifestly, in the present, incomplete. That opens some very solemn and intensely practical considerations.

Then I may further note that this antithesis includes the whole of the persons to whom the Gospel is preached. In one or other of these two classes they all stand. Further, we have to observe that the consideration which determines the class to which men belong, is the attitude which they respectively take to the preaching of the Cross. If it be, and because it is, 'foolishness' to some, they belong to the catalogue of the perishing. If it be, and because it is, 'the power of God' to others, they belong to the class of those who are in process of being saved.

So, then, we have the ground cleared for two or three very simple, but, as it seems to me, very important thoughts.

I. I desire, first, to look at the two contrasted conditions, 'perishing' and 'being saved.'

Now we shall best, I think, understand the force of the darker of these two terms if we first ask what is the force of the brighter and more radiant. If we understand what the Apostle means by 'saving' and 'salvation' we shall understand also what he means by 'perishing.'

If, then, we turn for a moment to Scripture analogy and teaching, we find that that threadbare word 'salvation,' which we all take it for granted that we understand, and which, like a well-worn coin, has been so passed from hand to hand that it scarcely remains legible

—that well-worn word 'salvation' starts from a double metaphorical meaning. It means either—and is used for both—being healed or being made safe. In the one sense it is often employed in the Gospel narratives of our Lord's miracles, and it involves the metaphor of a sick man and his cure; in the other it involves the metaphor of a man in peril and his deliverance and security. The negative side, then, of the Gospel idea of salvation is the making whole from a disease, and the making safe from a danger. Negatively, it is the removal from each of us of the one sickness, which is sin; and the one danger, which is the reaping of the fruits and consequences of sin, in their variety as guilt, remorse, habit, and slavery under it, perverted relation to God, a fearful apprehension of penal consequences here, and, if there be a hereafter, there, too. The sickness of soul and the perils that threaten life, flow from the central fact of sin, and salvation consists, negatively, in the sweeping away of all of these, whether the sin itself, or the fatal facility with which we yield to it, or the desolation and perversion which it brings into all the faculties and susceptibilities, or the perversion of relation to God, and the consequent evils, here and hereafter, which throng around the evil-doer. The sick man is healed, and the man in peril is set in safety.

But, besides that, there is a great deal more. The cure is incomplete till the full tide of health follows convalescence. When God saves, He does not only bar up the iron gate through which the hosts of evil rush out upon the defenceless soul, but He flings wide the golden gate through which the glad troops of blessings and of graces flock around the delivered spirit, and enrich it with all joys and with all beauties. So the positive side of salvation is the investiture of the saved man with throbbing health through all his veins, and the strength that comes from a divine life. It is the bestowal upon the delivered man of everything that he needs for blessedness and for duty. All good conferred, and every evil banned back into its dark den, such is the Christian conception of salvation. It is much that the negative should be accomplished, but it is little in comparison with the rich fulness of positive endowments, of happiness, and of holiness which make an integral part of the salvation of God.

This, then, being the one side, what about the other? If this be salvation, its precise opposite is the Scriptural idea of 'perishing.' Utter ruin lies in the word, the entire failure to be what God meant a man to be. That is in it, and no contortions of arbitrary interpretation can knock that solemn significance out of the dreadful expression. If salvation be the cure of the sickness, perishing is the fatal end of the unchecked disease. If salvation be the deliverance from the outstretched claws of the harpy evils that crowd about the trembling soul, then perishing is the fixing of their poisoned talons into their prey, and their rending of it into fragments.

Of course that is metaphor, but no metaphor can be half so dreadful as the plain, prosaic fact that the exact opposite of the salvation, which consists in the healing from sin and the deliverance from danger, and in the endowment with all gifts good and beautiful, is the Christian idea of the alternative 'perishing.' Then it means the disease running its course. It means the dangers laying hold of the man in peril. It means the withdrawal, or the non-bestowal, of all which is good, whether it be good of holiness or good of happiness. It does not mean, as it seems to me, the cessation of conscious existence, any more than salvation means the bestowal of conscious existence. But he who perishes knows that he has perished, even as he knows the process while he is in the process of perishing. Therefore, we have to think of the gradual fading away from consciousness, and dying out of a life, of many things beautiful and sweet and gracious, of the gradual increase of distance from Him, union with whom is the condition of true life, of the gradual sinking into the pit of utter ruin, of the gradual increase of that awful death in life and life in death in which living consciousness makes the conscious subject aware that he is lost; lost to God, lost to himself.

Brethren, it is no part of my business to enlarge upon such awful thoughts, but the brighter the light of salvation, the darker the eclipse of ruin which rings it round. This, then, is the first contrast.

II. Now note, secondly, the progressiveness of both members of the alternative.

All states of heart or mind tend to increase, by the very fact of continuance. Life is a process, and every part of a spiritual being is in living motion and continuous action in a given direction. So the law for the world, and for every man in it, in all regions of his life, quite as much as in the religious, is 'To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance.'

Look, then, at this thought of the process by which these two conditions become more and more confirmed, consolidated, and complete. Salvation is a progressive fact. In the New Testament we have that great idea looked at from three points of view. Sometimes it is spoken of as having been accomplished in the past in the case of every believing soul—'Ye have been saved' is said more than once. Sometimes it is spoken of as being accomplished in the present—'Ye are saved' is said more than once. And sometimes it is relegated to the future—'Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed,' and the like. But there are a number of New Testament passages which coincide with this text in regarding salvation as, not the work of any one moment, but as a continuous operation running through life, not a point either in the past, present, or future, but a continued life. As, for instance, 'The Lord added to the Church daily those that were being saved.' By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are being sanctified. And in a passage in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, which, in some respects, is an exact parallel to that of my text, we read of the preaching of the Gospel as being a 'savour of Christ in them that are being saved, and in them that are perishing.'

So the process of being saved is going on as long as a Christian man lives in this world; and every one who professes to be Christ's follower ought, day by day, to be growing more and more saved, more fully filled with that Divine Spirit, more entirely the conqueror

of his own lusts and passions and evil, more and more invested with all the gifts of holiness and of blessedness which Jesus Christ is ready to bestow upon him.

Ah, brethren! that notion of a progressive salvation at work in all true Christians has all but faded away out of the beliefs, as it has all but disappeared from the experience, of hosts of you that call yourselves Christ's followers, and are not a bit further on than you were ten years ago; are no more healed of your corruptions (perhaps less so, for relapses are dangerous) than you were then—have not advanced any further into the depths of God than when you first got a glimpse of Him as loving, and your Father, in Jesus Christ—are contented to linger, like some weak band of invaders in a strange land, on the borders and coasts, instead of pressing inwards and making it all your own. Growing Christians—may I venture to say?—are not the majority of professing Christians.

And, on the other side, as certainly, there are progressive deterioration and approximation to disintegration and ruin. How many men there are listening to me now who were far nearer being delivered from their sins when they were lads than they have ever been since! How many in whom the sensibility to the message of salvation has disappeared, in whom the world has ossified their consciences and their hearts, in whom there is a more entire and unstruggling submission to low things and selfish things and worldly things and wicked things, than there used to be! I am sure that there are not a few among us now who were far better, and far happier, when they were poor and young, and could still thrill with generous emotion and tremble at the Word of God, than they are to-day. Why! there are some of you that could no more bring back your former loftier impulses, and compunction of spirit and throbs of desire towards Christ and His salvation, than you could bring back the birds' nests or the snows of your youthful years. You are perishing, in the very process of going down and down into the dark.

Now, notice, that the Apostle treats these two classes as covering the whole ground of the hearers of the Word, and as alternatives. If not in the one class we are in the other. Ah, brethren! life is no level plane, but a steep incline, on which there is no standing still, and if you try to stand still, down you go. Either up or down must be the motion. If you are not more of a Christian than you were a year ago, you are less. If you are not more saved—for there is a degree of comparison—if you are not more saved, you are less saved.

Now, do not let that go over your head as pulpit thunder, meaning nothing. It means *you*, and, whether you feel or think it or not, one or other of these two solemn developments is at this moment going on in you. And that is not a thought to be put lightly on one side.

Further, note what a light such considerations as these, that salvation and perishing are vital processes—'going on all the time,' as the Americans say—throw upon the future. Clearly the two processes are incomplete here. You get the direction of the line, but not its natural termination. And thus a heaven and a hell are demanded by the phenomena of growing goodness and of growing badness which we see round about us. The arc of the circle is partially swept. Are the compasses going to stop at the point where the grave comes in? By no means. Round they will go, and will complete the circle. But that is not all. The necessity for progress will persist after death; and all through the duration of immortal being, goodness, blessedness, holiness, Godlikeness, will, on the one hand, grow in brighter lustre; and on the other, alienation from God, loss of the noble elements of the nature, and all the other doleful darknesses which attend that conception of a lost man, will increase likewise. And so, two people, sitting side by side here now, may start from the same level, and by the operation of the one principle the one may rise, and rise, and rise, till he is lost in God, and so finds himself, and the other sink, and sink, and sink, into the obscurity of woe and evil that lies beneath every human life as a possibility.

III. And now, lastly, notice the determining attitude to the Cross which settles the class to which we belong.

Paul, in my text, is explaining his reason for not preaching the Gospel with what he calls 'the words of man's wisdom,' and he says, in effect, 'It would be of no use if I did, because what settles whether the Cross shall look "foolishness" to a man or not is the man's whole moral condition, and what settles whether a man shall find it to be "the power of God" or not is whether he has passed into the region of those that are being saved.'

So there are two thoughts suggested which sound as if they were illogically combined, but which yet are both true. It is true that men perish, or are saved, because the Cross is to them respectively 'foolishness' or 'the power of God'; and the other thing is also true, that the Cross is to them 'foolishness,' or 'the power of God' because, respectively, they are perishing or being saved. That is not putting the cart before the horse, but both aspects of the truth are true.

If you see nothing in Jesus Christ, and His death for us all, except 'foolishness,' something unfit to do you any good, and unnecessary to be taken into account in your lives—oh, my friends! *that* is the condemnation of your eyes, and not of the thing you look at. If a man, gazing on the sun at twelve o'clock on a June day, says to me, 'It is not bright,' the only thing I have to say to him is, 'Friend, you had better go to an oculist.' And if to us the Cross is 'foolishness,' it is because already a process of 'perishing' has gone so far that it has attacked our capacity of recognising the wisdom and love of God when we see them.

But, on the other hand, if we clasp that Cross in simple trust, we find that it is the power which saves us out of all sins, sorrows, and dangers, and 'shall save us' at last 'into His heavenly kingdom.'

Dear friends, that message leaves no man exactly as it found him. My words, I feel, in this sermon, have been very poor, set by the side of the greatness of the theme; but, poor as they have been, you will not be exactly the same man after them, if you have listened to them, as you were before. The difference may be very imperceptible, but it will be real. One more, almost invisible, film, over the eyeball; one more thin layer of wax in the ear; one more fold of insensibility round heart and conscience—or else some yielding to the love; some finger put out to take the salvation; some lightening of the pressure of the sickness; some removal of the peril and the danger. The same sun hurts diseased eyes, and gladdens sound ones. The same fire melts wax and hardens clay. ‘This Child is set for the rise and fall of many in Israel.’ ‘To the one He is the savour of life unto life; to the other He is the savour of death unto death.’ *Which* is He, for He *is* one of them, to you?

THE APOSTLE'S THEME

‘I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.’—1 Corinthians 2:2.

Many of you are aware that to-day I close forty years of ministry in this city—I cannot say to this congregation, for there are very, very few that can go back with me in memory to the beginning of these years. You will bear me witness that I seldom intrude personal references into the pulpit, but perhaps it would be affectation not to do so now. Looking back over these long years, many thoughts arise which cannot be spoken in public. But one thing I may say, and that is, that I am grateful to God and to you, dear friends, for the unbroken harmony, confidence, affection, and forbearance which have brightened and lightened my work. Of its worth I cannot judge; its imperfections I know better than the most unfavourable critic; but I can humbly take the words of this text as expressive, not, indeed, of my attainments, but of my aims. One of my texts, on my first Sunday in Manchester, was ‘We preach Christ and Him crucified,’ and I look back, and venture to say that the noble words of this text have been, however imperfectly followed, my guiding star.

Now, I wish to say a word or two, less personal perhaps, and yet, as you can well suppose, not without a personal reference in my own consciousness.

I. Note here first, then, the Apostolic theme—Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Now, the Apostle, in this context, gives us a little autobiographical glimpse which is singularly and interestingly confirmed by some slight incidental notices in the Book of the Acts. He says, in the context, that he was with the Corinthians ‘in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,’ and, if we turn to the narrative, we find that a singular period of silence, apparent abandonment of his work and dejection, seems to have synchronised with his coming to the great city of Corinth. The reasons were very plain. He had recently come into Europe for the first time and had had to front a new condition of things, very different from what he had found in Palestine or in Asia Minor. His experience had not been encouraging. He had been imprisoned in Philippi; he had been smuggled away by night from Thessalonica; he had been hounded from Berea; he had all but wholly failed to make any impression in Athens, and in his solitude he came to Corinth, and lay quiet, and took stock of his adversaries. He came to the conclusion which he records in my text; he felt that it was not for him to argue with philosophers, or to attempt to vie with Sophists and professional orators, but that his only way to meet Greek civilisation, Greek philosophy, Greek eloquence, Greek self-conceit, was to preach ‘Christ and Him crucified.’ The determination was not come to in ignorance of the conditions that were fronting him. He knew Corinth, its wealth, its wickedness, its culture, and knowing these he said, ‘I have made up my mind that I will know nothing amongst you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.’

So, then, this Apostle's conception of his theme was—the biography of a Man, with especial emphasis laid on one act in His history—His death. Christianity is Christ, and Christ is Christianity. His relation to the truth that He proclaimed, and to the truths that may be deducible from the story of His life and death, is altogether different from the relation of any other founder of a religion to the truths that he has proclaimed. For in these you can accept the teaching, and ignore the teacher. But you cannot do that with Christianity; ‘I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life’; and in that revealing biography, which is the preacher's theme, the palpitating heart and centre is the death upon the Cross. So, whatever else Christianity comes to be—and it comes to be a great deal else—the principle of its growth, and the germ which must vitalise the whole, lie in the personality and the death of Jesus Christ.

That is not all. The history of the life and the death want something more to make them a gospel. The fact, I was going to say, is the least part of the fact; as in some vegetable growths, there is far more underground than above. For, unless along with, involved in, and deducible from, but capable of being stated separately from, the external facts, there is a certain commentary or explanation of them: the history is a history, the biography is a biography, the story of the Cross is a touching narrative, but it is no gospel.

And what was Paul's commentary which lifted the bare facts up into the loftier region? This—as for the person, Jesus Christ

'declared to be the son of God with power'—as for the fact of the death, 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures.' Let in these two conceptions into the facts—and they are the necessary explanation and presupposition of the facts—the Incarnation and the Sacrifice, and then you get what Paul calls 'my gospel,' not because it was his invention, but because it was the trust committed to him. That is the Gospel which alone answers to the facts which he deals with; and that is the Gospel which, God helping me, I have for forty years tried to preach.

We hear a great deal at present, or we did a few years ago, about this generation having recovered Jesus Christ, and about the necessity of going 'back to the Christ of the Gospels.' By all means, I say, if in the process you do not lose the Christ of the Epistles, who is the Christ of the Gospels, too. I am free to admit that a past generation has wrapped theological cobwebs round the gracious figure of Christ with disastrous results. For it is perfectly possible to know the things that are said about Him, and not to know Him about whom these things are said. But the mistake into which the present generation is far more likely to fall than that of substituting theology for Christ, is the converse one—that of substituting an undefined Christ for the Christ of the Gospels and the Epistles, the Incarnate Son of God, who died for our salvation. And that is a more disastrous mistake than the other, for you can know nothing about Him and He can be nothing to you, except as you grasp the Apostolic explanation of the bare facts—seeing in Him the Word who became flesh, the Son who died that we might receive the adoption of sons.

I would further point out that a clear conception of what the theme is, goes a long way to determine the method in which it shall be proclaimed. The Apostle says, in the passage which is parallel to the present one, in the previous chapter, 'We preach Christ crucified'; with strong emphasis on the word 'preach.' 'The Jew required a sign'; he wanted a man who would do something. The Greek sought after wisdom; he wanted a man who would perorate and argue and dissertate. Paul says, 'No!' 'We have nothing to do. We do not come to philosophise and to argue. We come with a message of fact that has occurred, of a Person that has lived.' And, as most of you know, the word which he uses means in its full signification, 'to proclaim as a herald does.'

Of course, if my business were to establish a set of principles, theological or otherwise, then argumentation would be my weapon, proofs would be my means, and my success would be that I should win your credence, your intellectual consent, and conviction. If I were here to proclaim simply a morality, then the thing that I would aim to secure would be obedience, and the method of securing it would be to enforce the authority and reasonableness of the command. But, seeing that my task is to proclaim a living Person and a historical fact, then the way to do that is to do as the herald does when in the market-place he stands, trumpet in one hand and the King's message in the other—proclaim it loudly, confidently, not 'with bated breath and whispering humbleness,' as if apologising, nor too much concerned to buttress it up with argumentation out of his own head, but to say, 'Thus saith the Lord,' and to what the Lord saith conscience says, 'Amen.' Brethren, we need far more, in all our pulpits, of that unhesitating confidence in the plain, simple proclamation, stripped, as far as possible, of human additions and accretions, of the great fact and the great Person on whom all our salvation depends.

II. So let me ask you to notice the exclusiveness which this theme demands.

'Nothing but,' says Paul. I might venture to say—though perhaps the tone of the personal allusions in this sermon may seem to contradict it—that this exclusiveness is to be manifested in one very difficult direction, and that that is, the herald shall efface himself. We have to hold up the picture; and if I might take such a metaphor, like a man in a gallery who is displaying some masterpiece to the eyes of the beholders, we have to keep ourselves well behind it; and it will be wise if not even a finger-tip is allowed to steal in front and come into sight. One condition, I believe, of real power in the ministration of the Gospel, is that people shall be convinced that the preacher is thinking not at all about himself, but altogether about his message. You remember that wonderfully pathetic utterance from John the Baptist's stern lips, which derives much additional pathos and tenderness from the character of the man from whom it came, when they asked him, 'Who art thou?' and his answer was, 'I am a Voice.' I am a Voice; that is all! Ah, that is the example! We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord. We must efface ourselves if we would proclaim Christ.

But I turn to another direction in which this theme demands exclusiveness, and I revert to the previous chapter where in the parallel portion to the words of my text, we find the Apostle very clearly conscious of the two great streams of expectation and wish which he deliberately thwarted and set at nought. 'The Jews require a sign—but we preach Christ crucified. The Greeks seek after wisdom,' but again, 'we preach Christ crucified.' Now, take these two. They are representations, in a very emphatic way, of two sets of desires and mental characteristics, which divide the world between them.

On the one hand, there is the sensuous tendency that wants something done for it, something to see, something that sense can grasp at; and so, as it fancies, work itself upwards into a higher region. 'The Jew requires a sign'—that is, not merely a miracle, but something to look at. He wants a visible sacrifice; he wants a priest. He wants religion to consist largely in the doing of certain acts which may be supposed to bring, in some magical fashion, spiritual blessings. And Paul opposes to that, 'We preach Christ crucified.' Brethren, the tendency is strong to-day, not only in those parts of the Anglican communion where sacramentarian theories are in favour, but amongst all sections of the Christian Church, in which there is obvious a drift towards more ornate ritual, and aesthetic services, as means of attracting to church or chapel, and as more important than proclaiming Christ. I am free to confess

that possibly some of us, with our Puritan upbringing and tendency, too much disregard that side of human nature. Possibly it is so. But for all that I profoundly believe that if religion is to be strong it must have a very, very small infusion of these external aids to spiritual worship, and that few things more weaken the power of the Gospel that Paul preached than the lowering of the flag in conformity with desires of men of sense, and substituting for the simple glory of the preached Word the meretricious, and in time impotent, and always corrupting, attractions of a sensuous worship.

Further, 'The Greeks seek after wisdom.' They wanted demonstration, abstract principles, systematised philosophies, and the like. Paul comes again with his 'We preach Christ and Him crucified.' The wisdom is there, as I shall have to say in a moment, but the form that it takes is directly antagonistic to the wishes of these wisdom-seeking Greeks. The same thing in modern guise besets us to-day. We are called upon, on all sides, to bring into the pulpit what they call an ethical gospel; putting it into plain English, to preach morality, and to leave out Christ. We are called upon, on all sides, to preach an applied Christianity, a social gospel—that is to say, largely to turn the pulpit into a Sunday supplement to the daily newspaper. We are asked to deal with the intellectual difficulties which spring from the collision of science, true or false, with religion, and the like. All that is right enough. But I believe from my heart that the thing to do is to copy Paul's example, and to preach Christ and Him crucified. You may think me right or you may think me wrong, but here and now, at the end of forty years, I should like to say that I have for the most part ignored that class of subjects deliberately, and of set purpose, and with a profound conviction, be it erroneous or not, that a ministry which listens much to the cry for 'wisdom' in its modern forms, has departed from the true perspective of Christian teaching, and will weaken the churches which depend upon it. Let who will turn the pulpit into a professor's chair, or a lecturer's platform, or a concert-room stage or a politician's rostrum, I for one determine to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

III. Lastly, observe the all-sufficient comprehensiveness which this theme secures.

Paul says 'nothing but'; he might have said 'everything in.' For 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified' covers all the ground of men's needs. No doubt many of you will have been saying to yourselves whilst you have been listening, if you have been listening, to what I have been saying, 'Ah! old-fashioned narrowness; quite out of date in this generation.' Brethren, there are two ways of adapting one's ministry to the times. One is falling in with the requirements of the times, and the other is going dead against them, and both of these methods have to be pursued by us.

But the exclusiveness of which I have been speaking, is no narrow exclusiveness. Paul felt that, if he was to give the Corinthians what they needed, he must refuse to give them what they wanted, and that whilst he crossed their wishes he was consulting their necessities. That is true yet, for the preaching that bases itself upon the life and death of Jesus Christ, conceived as Paul had learned from Jesus Christ to conceive them, that Gospel, whilst it brushes aside men's superficial wishes, goes straight to the heart of their deep-lying universal necessities, for what the Jew needs most is not a sign, and what the Greek needs most is not wisdom, but what they both need most is deliverance from the guilt and power of sin. And we all, scholars and fools, poets and commonplace people, artists and ploughmen, all of us, in all conditions of life, in all varieties of culture, in all stages of intellectual development, in all diversities of occupation and of mental bias, what we all have in common is that human heart in which sin abides, and what we all need most to have is that evil drop squeezed out of it, and our souls delivered from the burden and the bondage. Therefore, any man that comes with a sign, and does not deal with the sin of the human heart, and any man that comes with a philosophical system of wisdom, and does not deal with sin, does not bring a Gospel that will meet the necessities even of the people to whose cravings he has been aiming to adapt his message.

But, beyond that, in this message of Christ and Him crucified, there lies in germ the satisfaction of all that is legitimate in these desires that at first sight it seems to thwart. 'A sign?' Yes, and where is there power like the power that dwells in Him who is the Incarnate might of omnipotence? 'Wisdom?' Yes, and where is there wisdom, except 'in Him in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'? Let the Jew come to the Cross, and in the weak Man hanging there, he will find a mightier revelation of the power of God than anywhere else. Let the Greek come to the Cross, and there he will find wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. The bases of all social, economical, political reform and well-being, lie in the understanding and the application to social and national life, of the principles that are wrapped in, and are deduced from, the Incarnation and the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We have not learned them all yet. They have not all been applied to national and individual life yet. I plead for no narrow exclusiveness, but for one consistent with the widest application of Christian principles to all life. Paul determined to know nothing but Jesus, and to know everything in Jesus, and Jesus in everything. Do not begin your building at the second-floor windows. Put in your foundations first, and be sure that they are well laid. Let the Sacrifice of Christ, in its application to the individual and his sins, be ever the basis of all that you say. And then, when that foundation is laid, exhibit, to your heart's content, the applications of Christianity and its social aspects. But be sure that the beginning of them all is the work of Christ for the individual sinful soul, and the acceptance of that work by personal faith.

Dear friends, ours has been a long and happy union but it is a very solemn one. My responsibilities are great; yours are not small. Let me beseech you to ask yourselves if, with all your kindness to the messenger, you have given heed to the message. Have you passed beyond the voice that speaks, to Him of whom it speaks? Have you taken the truth—veiled and weakened as I know it has

been by my words, but yet in them—for what it is, the word of the living God? My occupancy of this pulpit must in the nature of things, before long, come to a close, but the message which I have brought to you will survive all changes in the voice that speaks here. 'All flesh is grass ... the Word of the Lord endureth for ever.' And, closing these forty years, during a long part of which some of you have listened most lovingly and most forbearingly, I leave with you this, which I venture to quote, though it is my Master's word about Himself, 'I judge you not; the word which I have spoken unto you, the same shall judge you in the last day.'

GOD'S FELLOW-WORKERS

'Labourers together with God.'—1 Corinthians 3:9.

The characteristic Greek tendency to factions was threatening to rend the Corinthian Church, and each faction was swearing by a favourite teacher. Paul and his companion, Apollos, had been taken as the figureheads of two of these parties, and so he sets himself in the context, first of all to show that neither of the two was of any real importance in regard to the Church's life. They were like a couple of gardeners, one of whom did the planting, and the other the watering; but neither the man that put the little plant into the ground, nor the man that came after him with a watering-pot, had anything to do with originating the mystery of the life by which the plant grew. That was God's work, and the pair that had planted and watered were nothing. So what was the use of fighting which of two nothings was the greater?

But then he bethinks himself that that is not quite all. The man that plants and the man that waters are something after all. They do not communicate life, but they do provide for its nourishment. And more than that, the two operations—that of the man with the dibble and that of the man with the watering-pot—are one in issue; and so they are partners, and in some respects may be regarded as one. Then what is the sense of pitting them against each other?

But even that is not quite all; though united in operation, they are separate in responsibility and activity, and will be separate in reward. And even that is not all; for, being nothing and yet something, being united and yet separate, they are taken into participation and co-operation with God; and as my text puts it, in what is almost a presumptuous phrase, they are 'labourers together with Him.' That partnership of co-operation is not merely a partnership of the two, but it is a partnership of the three—God and the two who, in some senses, are one.

Now whilst this text is primarily spoken in regard to the apostolic and evangelistic work of these early teachers, the principle which it embodies is a very wide one, and it applies in all regions of life and activity, intellectual, scholastic, philanthropic, social. Where-ever men are thinking God's thoughts and trying to carry into effect any phase or side of God's manifold purposes of good and blessing to the world, there it is true. We claim no special or exclusive prerogative for the Christian teacher. Every man that is trying to make men understand God's thought, whether it is expressed in creation, or whether it is written in history, or whether it is carven in half-obliterated letters on the constitution of human nature, every man who, in any region of society or life, is seeking to effect the great designs of the universal loving Father—can take to himself, in the measure and according to the manner of his special activity, the great encouragement of my text, and feel that he, too, in his little way, is a fellow-helper to the truth and a fellow-worker with God. But then, of course, according to New Testament teaching, and according to the realities of the case, the highest form in which men thus can co-operate with God, and carry into effect His purposes is that in which men devote themselves, either directly or indirectly, to spreading throughout the whole world the name and the power of the Saviour Jesus Christ, in whom all God's will is gathered, and through whom all God's blessings are communicated to mankind. So the thought of my text comes appropriately when I have to bring before you the claims of our missionary operations.

Now, the first way in which I desire to look at this great idea expressed in these words, is that we find in it

I. A solemn thought.

'Labourers together with God.' Cannot He do it all Himself? No. God needs men to carry out His purposes. True, on the Cross, Jesus spoke the triumphant word, 'It is finished!' He did not thereby simply mean that He had completed all His suffering; but He meant that He had then done all which the world needed to have done in order that it should be a redeemed world. But for the distribution and application of that finished work God depends on men. You all know, in your own daily businesses, how there must be a middleman between the mill and the consumer. The question of organising a distributing agency is quite as important as any other part of the manufacturer's business. The great reservoir is full, but there has to be a system of irrigating-channels by which the water is carried into every corner of the field that is to be watered. Christian men individually, and the Church collectively, supply—may I call it the missing link?—between a redeeming Saviour and the world which He has redeemed in act, but which is not actually redeemed, until it has received the message of the great Redemption that is wrought. The supernatural is implanted in the very heart of the mass of leaven by the Incarnation and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ; but the spreading of that supernatural revelation is left in the

hands of men who work through natural processes, and who thus become labourers together with God, and enable Christ to be to single souls, in blessed reality, what He is potentially to the world, and has been ever since. He died upon the Cross. 'It is finished.' Yes—because it is finished, our work begins.

Let me remind you of the profound symbolism in that incident where our Lord for once appeared conspicuously, and almost ostentatiously, before Israel as its true King. He had need—as He Himself said—of the meek beast on which He rode. He cannot pass, in His coronation procession, through the world unless He has us, by whom He may be carried into every corner of the earth. So 'the Lord has need' of us, and we are 'fellow-labourers with Him.'

But this same thought suggests another point. We have here a solemn call addressed to every Christian man and woman.

Do not let us run away with the idea that, because here the Apostle is speaking in regard to himself and Apollos, he is enunciating a truth which applies only to Apostles and evangelists. It is true of all Christians. My knowledge of and faith in Jesus Christ as my own personal Saviour impose upon me the obligation, in so far as my opportunities and capacities extend, thus to co-operate with Him in spreading His great Name. Every Christian man, just because he is a Christian, is invested with the power—and power to its last particle is duty—and is, therefore, burdened with the honourable obligation to work for God. There is such a thing as 'coming to the help of the Lord,' though that phrase seems to reverse altogether the true relation. It is the duty of every Christian, partly because of loyalty to Jesus, and partly because of the responsibility which the very constitution of society lays upon every one of us, to diffuse what he possesses, and to be a distributing agent for the life that he himself enjoys. Brethren! there is no possibility of Christian men or women being fully faithful to the Saviour, unless they recognise that the duty of being a fellow-labourer with God inevitably follows on being a possessor of Christ's salvation; and that no Apostle, no official, no minister, no missionary, has any more necessity laid upon him to preach the Gospel, nor pulls down any heavier woe on himself if he is unfaithful, than has and does each one of Christ's servants.

So 'we are fellow-labourers with God.' Alas! alas! how poorly the average Christian realises—I do not say discharges, but realises—that obligation! Brethren, I do not wish to find fault, but I do beseech you to ask yourselves whether, if you are Christians, you are doing anything the least like what my text contemplates as the duty of all Christians.

May I say a word or two with regard to another aspect of this solemn call? Does not the thought of working along with God prescribe for us the sort of work that we ought to do? We ought to work in God's fashion, and if we wish to know what God's fashion is, we have but to look at Jesus Christ. We ought to work in Jesus Christ's fashion. We all know what that involved of self-sacrifice, of pain, of weariness, of utter self-oblivious devotion, of gentleness, of tenderness, of infinite pity, of love running over. 'The master's eye makes a good servant.' The Master's hand working along with the servant ought to make the servant work after the Master's fashion. 'As My Father hath sent Me, so send I you.' If we felt that side by side with us, like two sailors hauling on one rope, 'the Servant of the Lord' was toiling, do you not think it would burn up all our selfishness, and light up all our indifference, and make us spend ourselves in His service? A fellow-labourer with God will surely never be lazy and selfish. Thus my text has in it, to begin with, a solemn call.

It suggests

II. A signal honour.

Suppose a great painter, a Raphael or a Turner, taking a little boy that cleaned his brushes, and saying to him, 'Come into my studio, and I will let you do a bit of work upon my picture.' Suppose an aspirant, an apprentice in any walk of life, honoured by being permitted to work along with some one who was recognised all over the world as being at the very top of that special profession. Would it not be a feather in the boy's cap all his life? And would he not think it the greatest honour that ever had been done him that he was allowed to co-operate, in however inferior a fashion, with such an one? Jesus Christ says to us, 'Come and work here side by side with Me,' But Christian men, plenty of them, answer, 'It is a perpetual nuisance, this continual application for money! money! money! work! work! work! It is never-ending, and it is a burden!' Yes, it is a burden, just because it is an honour. Do you know that the Hebrew word which means 'glory' literally means 'weight'? There is a great truth in that. You cannot get true honours unless you are prepared to carry them as burdens. And the highest honour that Jesus Christ gives to men when He says to them, not only 'Go work to-day in My vineyard,' but 'Come, work here side by side with Me,' is a heavy weight which can only be lightened by a cheerful heart.

Is it not the right way to look at all the various forms of Christian activity which are made imperative upon Christian people, by their possession of Christianity as being tokens of Christ's love to us? Do you remember that this same Apostle said, 'Unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given, that I should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ?' He could speak about burdens and heavy tasks, and being 'persecuted but not forsaken,' almost crushed down and yet not in despair, and about the weights that came upon him daily, 'the care of all the churches,' but far beneath all the sense of his heavy load lay the thrill of thankful wonder that to him, of all men in the world, knowing as he did better than anybody else could do his own imperfection and

insufficiency, this distinguishing honour had been bestowed, that he was made the Apostle to the Gentiles. That is the way in which the true man will always look at what the selfish man, and the half-and-half Christian, look at as being a weight and a weariness, or a disagreeable duty, which is to be done as perfunctorily as possible. One question that a great many who call themselves Christians ask is, 'With how little service can I pass muster?' Ah, it is because we have so little of the Spirit of Christ in us that we feel burdened by His command, 'Go ye into all the world,' as being so heavy; and that so many of us—I leave you to judge if you are in the class—so many of us make it criminally light if we do not ignore it altogether. I believe that, if it were possible to conceive of the duty and privilege of spreading Christ's name in the world being withdrawn from the Church, all His real servants would soon be yearning to have it back again. It is a token of His love; it is a source of infinite blessings to ourselves; 'if the house be not worthy, your peace shall return to you again.'

And now, lastly, we have suggested by this text

III. A strong encouragement.

'Fellow-labourers with God'—then, God is a Fellow-labourer with us. The co-operation works both ways, and no man who is seeking to spread that great salvation, to distribute that great wealth, to irrigate some little corner of the field by some little channel that he has dug, needs to feel that he is labouring alone. If I am working with God, God is working with me. Do you remember that most striking picture which is drawn in the verses appended to Mark's Gospel, which tells how the universe seemed parted into two halves, and up above in the serene the Lord 'sat on the right hand of God,' while below, in the murky and obscure, 'they went everywhere preaching the Word.' The separation seems complete, but the two halves are brought together by the next word—'The Lord also,' sitting up yonder, 'working with them' the wandering preachers down here, 'confirming the words with signs following.' Ascended on high, entered into His rest, having finished His work, He yet is working with us, if we are labourers together with God. If we turn to the last book of Scripture, which draws back the curtain from the invisible world which is all filled with the glorified Christ, and shows its relations to the earthly militant church, we read no longer of a Christ enthroned in apparent ease, but of a Christ walking amidst the candlesticks, and of a Lamb standing in the midst of the Throne, and opening the seals, launching forth into the world the sequences of the world's history, and of the Word of God charging His enemies on His white horse, and behind Him the armies of God following. The workers who labour with God have the ascended Christ labouring with them.

But if God works with us, success is sure. Then comes the old question that Gideon asked with bitterness of heart, when he was threshing out his handful of wheat in a corner to avoid the oppressors, 'If the Lord be with us, wherefore is all this come upon us? Will any one say that the progress of the Gospel in the world has been at the rate which its early believers expected, or at the rate which its own powers warranted them to expect? Certainly not. And so it comes to this, that whilst every true labourer has God working with him, and therefore success is certain, the planter and the waterer can delay the growth of the plant by their unfaithfulness, by not expecting success, by not so working as to make it likely, or by neutralising their evangelistic efforts by their worldly lives. When Jesus Christ was on earth, it is recorded, 'He could there do no mighty works because of their unbelief, save that He laid His hands on a few sick folk and healed them.' A faithless Church, a worldly Church, a lazy Church, an unspiritual Church, an un-Christlike Church—which, to a large extent, is the designation of the so-called Church of to day—can clog His chariot-wheels, can thwart the work, can hamper the Divine Worker. If the Christians of Manchester were revived, they could win Manchester for Jesus. If the Christians of England lived their Christianity, they could make England what it never has been but in name—a Christian country. If the Church universal were revived, it could win the world. If the single labourer, or the community of such, is labouring 'in the Lord,' their labour will not be in vain; and if they thus plant and water, God will give the increase.

THE TESTING FIRE

'Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble: 13. Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.'—1 Corinthians 3:12, 13.

Before I enter upon the ideas which the words suggest, my exegetical conscience binds me to point out that the original application of the text is not exactly that which I purpose to make of it now. The context shows that the Apostle is thinking about the special subject of Christian teachers and their work, and that the builders of whom he speaks are the men in the Corinthian Church, some of them his allies and some of them his rivals, who were superimposing upon the foundation of the preaching of Jesus Christ other doctrines and principles. The 'wood, hay, stubble' are the vapid and trivial doctrines which the false teachers were introducing into the Church. The 'gold, silver, and precious stones' are the solid and substantial verities which Paul and his friends were proclaiming. And it is about these, and not about the Christian life in the general, that the tremendous metaphors of my text are uttered.

But whilst that is true, the principles involved have a much wider range than the one case to which the Apostle applies them. And, though I may be slightly deflecting the text from its original direction, I am not doing violence to it, if I take it as declaring some very plain and solemn truths applicable to all Christian people, in their task of building up a life and character on the foundation of Jesus Christ; truths which are a great deal too much forgotten in our modern popular Christianity, and which it concerns us all very clearly to keep in view. There are three things here that I wish to say a word about—the patchwork building, the testing fire, the fate of the builders.

I. First, the patchwork structure.

'If any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble.' In the original application of the metaphor, Paul is thinking of all these teachers in that church at Corinth as being engaged in building the one structure—I venture to deflect here, and to regard each of us as rearing our own structure of life and character on the foundation of the preached and accepted Christ.

Now, what the Apostle says is that these builders were, some of them, laying valuable things like gold and silver and costly stones—by which he does not mean jewels, but marbles, alabasters, polished porphyry or granite, and the like; sumptuous building materials, which were employed in great palaces or temples—and that some of them were bringing timber, hay, stubble, reeds gathered from the marshes or the like, and filling in with such trash as that. That is a picture of what a great many Christian people are doing in their own lives—the same man building one course of squared and solid and precious stones, and topping them with rubbish. You will see in the walls of Jerusalem, at the base, five or six courses of those massive blocks which are the wonders of the world yet; well jointed, well laid, well cemented, and then on the top of them a mass of poor stuff, heaped together anyhow; scamped work—may I use a modern vulgarism?—'jerry-building.' You may go to some modern village, on an ancient historic site, and you will find built into the mud walls of the hovels in which the people are living, a marble slab with fair carving on it, or the drum of a great column of veined marble, and on the top of that, timber and clay mixed together.

That is the type of the sort of life that hosts of Christian people are living. For, mark, all the builders are on the foundation. Paul is not speaking about mere professed Christians who had no faith at all in them, and no real union with Jesus Christ. These builders were 'on the foundation'; they were building on the foundation, there was a principle deep down in their lives—which really lay at the bottom of their lives—and yet had not come to such dominating power as to mould and purify and make harmonious with itself the life that was reared upon it. We all know that that is the condition of many men, that they have what really are the fundamental bases of their lives, in belief and aim and direction; and which yet are not strong enough to master the whole of the life, and to manifest themselves through it. Especially it is the condition of some Christian people. They have a real faith, but it is of the feeblest and most rudimentary kind. They are on the foundation, but their lives are interlaced with the most heterogeneous mixty-maxy of good and evil, of lofty, high, self-sacrificing thoughts and heavenward aspirations, of resolutions never carried out into practice; and side by side with these there shall be meannesses, selfishnesses, tempers, dispositions all contradictory of the former impulses. One moment they are all fire and love, the next moment ice and selfishness. One day they are all for God, the next day all for the world, the flesh, and the devil. Jacob sees the open heavens and the face of God and vows; to-morrow he meets Laban and drops to shifty ways. Peter leaves all and follows his Master, and in a little while the fervour has gone, and the fire has died down into grey ashes, and a flippant servant-girl's tongue leads him to say 'I know not the man.' 'Gold, silver, precious stones,' and topping them, 'wood, hay, stubble!'

The inconsistencies of the Christian life are what my text, in the application that I am venturing to make of it, suggests to us. Ah, dear friends! we do not need to go to Jacob and Peter; let us look at our own hearts, and if we will honestly examine one day of our lives, I think we shall understand how it is possible for a man, on the foundation, yet to build upon it these worthless and combustible things, 'wood, hay, stubble.'

We are not to suppose that one man builds *only* 'gold, silver, precious stones.' There is none of us that does that. And we are not to suppose that any man who *is* on the foundations has so little grasp of it, as that he builds *only* 'wood, hay, stubble.'

There is none of us who has not intermingled his building, and there is none of us, if we are Christians at all, who has not sometimes laid a course of 'precious stones.' If your faith is doing *nothing* for you except bringing to you a belief that you are not going to hell when you die, then it is no faith at all. 'Faith without works is dead.' So there is a mingling in the best, and—thank God!—there is a mingling of good with evil, in the worst of real Christian people.

II. Note here, the testing fire.

Paul points to two things, the day and the fire.

'The day shall declare it,' that is the day on which Jesus Christ comes to be the Judge; and it, that is 'the day,' 'shall be revealed in fire; and the fire shall test every man's work.' Now, it is to be noticed that here we are moving altogether in the region of lofty

symbolism, and that the metaphor of the testing fire is suggested by the previous enumeration of building materials, gold and silver being capable of being assayed by flame; and 'wood, hay, stubble' being combustible, and sure to be destroyed thereby. The fire here is not an emblem of punishment; it is not an emblem of cleansing. There is no reference to anything in the nature of what Roman Catholics call purgatorial fires. The allusion is simply to some stringent and searching means of testing the quality of a man's work, and of revealing that quality.

So then, we come just to this, that for people 'on the foundation,' there is a Day of revelation and testing of their life's work. It is a great misfortune that so-called Evangelical Christianity does not say as much as the New Testament says about the judgment that is to be passed on 'the house of God.' People seem to think that the great doctrine of salvation, 'not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by His mercy,' is, somehow or other, interfered with when we proclaim, as Paul proclaims, speaking to Christian people, 'We must be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ,' and declares that 'Every man will receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.' Paul saw no contradiction, and there is no contradiction. But a great many professing Christians seem to think that the great blessing of their salvation by faith is, that they are exempt from that future revelation and testing and judgment of their acts. That is not the New Testament teaching. But, on the contrary, 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,' was originally said to a church of Christian people. And here we come full front against that solemn truth, that the Lord will 'gather together His saints, those that have made a covenant with Him by sacrifice, that He may judge His people.' Never mind about the drapery, the symbolism, the expression in material forms with which that future judgment is arranged, in order that we may the more easily grasp it. Remember that these pictures in the New Testament of a future judgment are highly symbolical, and not to be interpreted as if they were plain prose; but also remember that the heart of them is this, that there comes for Christian people as for all others, a time when the light will shine down upon their past, and will flash its rays into the dark chambers of memory, and when men will—to themselves if not to others—be revealed 'in the day when the Lord shall judge the secrets of men according to my Gospel.'

We have all experience enough of how but a few years, a change of circumstances, or a growth into another stage of development, give us fresh eyes with which to estimate the moral quality of our past. Many a thing, which we thought to be all right at the time when we did it, looks to us now very questionable and a plain mistake. And when we shift our stations to up yonder, and get rid of all this blinding medium of flesh and sense, and have the issues of our acts in our possession, and before our sight—ah! we shall think very differently of a great many things from what we think of them now. Judgment will begin at the house of God.

And there is the other thought, that the fire which reveals and tests has also in it a power of destruction. Gold and silver will lose no atom of their weight, and will be brightened into greater lustre as they flash back the beams. The timber and the stubble will go up in a flare, and die down into black ashes. That is highly metaphorical, of course. What does it mean? It means that some men's work will be crumpled up and perish, and be as of none effect, leaving a great, black sorrowful gap in the continuity of the structure, and that other men's work will stand. Everything that we do is, in one sense, immortal, because it is represented in our final character and condition, just as a thin stratum of rock will represent forests of ferns that grew for one summer millenniums ago, or clouds of insects that danced for an hour in the sun. But whilst that is so, and nothing human ever dies, on the other hand, deeds which have been in accordance, as it were, with the great stream that sweeps the universe on its bosom will float on that surface and never sink. Acts which have gone against the rush of God's will through creation will be like a child's go-cart that comes against the engine of an express train—be reduced, first, to stillness, all the motion knocked out of them, and then will be crushed to atoms. Deeds which stand the test will abide in blessed issue for the doer, and deeds which do not will pass away in smoke, and leave only ashes. Some of us, building on the foundation, have built more rubbish than solid work, and that will be

'Cast as rubbish to the void When God has made the pile complete.'

III. So, lastly, we have here the fate of the two builders.

The one man gets wages. That is not the bare notion of salvation, for both builders are conceived of as on the foundation, and both are saved. He gets wages. Yes, of course! The architect has to give his certificate before the builder gets his cheque. The weaver, who has been working his hand-loom at his own house, has to take his web to the counting-house and have it overlooked before he gets his pay. And the man who has built 'gold, silver, precious stones,' will have—over and above the initial salvation—in himself the blessed consequences, and unfold the large results, of his faithful service; while the other man, inasmuch as he has not such work, cannot have the consequences of it, and gets no wages; or at least his pay is subject to heavy deductions for the spoiled bits in the cloth, and for the gaps in the wall.

The Apostle employs a tremendous metaphor here, which is masked in our Authorised Version, but is restored in the Revised. 'He shall be saved, yet so as' (not 'by' but) 'through fire'; the picture being that of a man surrounded by a conflagration, and making a rush through the flames to get to a place of safety. Paul says that he will get through, because down *below* all inconsistency and worldliness, there was a little of that which ought to have been *above* all the inconsistency and the worldliness—a true faith in Jesus Christ. But because it was so imperfect, so feeble, so little operative in his life as that it could not keep him from piling up

inconsistencies into his wall, therefore his salvation is so as through the fire.

Brethren, I dare not enlarge upon that great metaphor. It is meant for us professing Christians, real and imperfect Christians—it is meant for us; and it just tells us that there are degrees in that future blessedness proportioned to present faithfulness. We begin there where we left off here. That future is not a dead level; and they who have earnestly striven to work out their faith into their lives shall 'summer high upon the hills of God.' One man, like Paul in his shipwreck, shall lose ship and lading, though 'on broken pieces of the ship' he may 'escape safe to land'; and another shall make the harbour with full cargo of works of faith, to be turned into gold when he lands. If we build, as we all may, 'on that foundation, gold and silver and precious stones,' an entrance 'shall be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'; whilst if we bring a preponderance of 'wood, hay, stubble,' we shall be 'saved, yet so as through the fire.'

TEMPLES OF GOD

'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?'—1 Corinthians 3:16

The great purpose of Christianity is to make men like Jesus Christ. As He is the image of the invisible God we are to be the images of the unseen Christ. The Scripture is very bold and emphatic in attributing to Christ's followers likeness to Him, in nature, in character, in relation to the world, in office, and in ultimate destiny. Is He the anointed of God? We are anointed—Christ in Him. Is He the Son of God? We in Him receive the adoption of sons. Is He the Light of the world? We in Him are lights of the world too. Is He a King? A Priest? He hath made us to be kings and priests.

Here we have the Apostle making the same solemn assertion in regard to Christian men, 'Know ye not that ye are'—as your Master, and because your Master is—that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?'

Of course the allusion in my text is to the whole aggregate of believers—what we call the Catholic Church, as being collectively the habitation of God. But God cannot dwell in an aggregate of men, unless He dwells in the individuals that compose the aggregate. And God has nothing to do with institutions except through the people who make the institutions. And so, if the Church as a whole is a Temple, it is only because all its members are temples of God.

Therefore, without forgetting the great blessed lesson of the unity of the Church which is taught in these words, I want rather to deal with them in their individual application now; and to try and lay upon your consciences, dear brethren, the solemn obligations and the intense practical power which this Apostle associated with the thought that each Christian man was, in very deed, a temple of God.

It would be very easy to say eloquent things about this text, but that is no part of my purpose.

I. Let me deal, first of all, and only for a moment or two, with the underlying thought that is here—that every Christian is a dwelling-place of God.

Now, do not run away with the idea that that is a metaphor. It was the outward temple that was the metaphor. The reality is that which you and I, if we are God's children in Jesus Christ, experience. There was no real sense in which that Mighty One whom the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain, dwelt in any house made with hands. But the Temple, and all the outward worship, were but symbolical of the facts of the Christian life, and the realities of our inward experience. These are the truths whereof the other is the shadow. We use words to which it is difficult for us to attach any meaning, when we talk about God as being locally present in any material building; but we do not use words to which it is so difficult to attach a meaning, when we talk about the Infinite Spirit as being present and abiding in a spirit shaped to hold Him, and made on purpose to touch Him and be filled by Him.

All creatures have God dwelling in them in the measure of their capacity. The stone that you kick on the road would not be there if there were not a present God. Nothing would happen if there were not abiding in creatures the force, at any rate, which is God. But just as in this great atmosphere in which we all live and move and have our being, the eye discerns undulations which make light, and the ear catches vibrations which make sound, and the nostrils are recipient of motions which bring fragrance, and all these are in the one atmosphere, and the sense that apprehends one is utterly unconscious of the other, so God's creatures, each through some little narrow slit, and in the measure of their capacity, get a straggling beam from Him into their being, and therefore they are.

But high above all other ways in which creatures can lie patent to God, and open for the influx of a Divine Indweller, lies the way of faith and love. Whosoever opens his heart in these divinely-taught emotions, and fixes them upon the Christ in whom God dwells, receives into the very roots of his being—as the water that trickles through the soil to the rootlets of the tree—the very Godhead Himself. 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.'

That God shall dwell in my heart is possible only from the fact that He dwelt in all His fulness in Christ, through whom I touch Him. That Temple consecrates all heart-shrines; and all worshippers that keep near to Him, partake with Him of the Father that dwelt in Him.

Only remember that in Christ God dwelt completely, all 'the fulness of the Godhead bodily' was there, but in us it is but partially; that in Christ, therefore, the divine indwelling was uniform and invariable, but in us it fluctuates, and sometimes is more intimate and blessed, and sometimes He leaves the habitation when we leave Him; that in Christ, therefore, there was no progress in the divine indwelling, but that in us, if there be any true inhabitation of our souls by God, that abiding will become more and more, until every corner of our being is hallowed and filled with the searching effulgence of the all-pervasive Light. And let us remember that God dwelt in Christ, but that in us it is God in Christ who dwells. So to Him we owe it all, that our poor hearts are made the dwelling-place of God; or, as this Apostle puts it, in other words conveying the same idea, 'Ye are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth ... for a habitation of God through the Spirit.'

II. Now then, turning from this underlying idea of the passage, let us look, for a moment, at some of the many applications of which the great thought is susceptible. I remark, then, in the second place, that as temples all Christians are to be manifesters of God.

The meaning of the Temple as of all temples was, that there the indwelling Deity should reveal Himself; and if it be true that we Christian men and women are, in this deep and blessed reality of which I have been speaking, the abiding places and habitations of God, then it follows that we shall stand in the world as the great means by which God is manifested and made known, and that in a two-fold way; *to ourselves* and *to other people*.

The real revelation of God to our hearts must be His abiding in our hearts. We do not learn God until we possess God. He must fill our souls before we know His sweetness. The answer that our Lord made to one of His disciples is full of the deepest truth. 'How is it,' said one of them in his blundering way, 'how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself to us?' And the answer was, 'We will come and make Our abode with him.' You do not know God until, if I might so say, He sits at your fireside and talks with you in your hearts. Just as some wife may have a husband whom the world knows as hero, or sage, or orator, but she knows him as nobody else can; so the outside, and if I may so say, the public character of God is but the surface of the revelation that He makes to us, when in the deepest secrecy of our own hearts He pours Himself into our waiting spirits. O brethren! it is within the curtains of the Holiest of all that the Shekinah flashes; it is within our own hearts, shrined and templed there, that God reveals Himself to us, as He does not unto the world.

And then, further, Christian men, as the temples and habitations of God, are appointed to be the great means of making Him known to the world around. The eye that cannot look at the sun can look at the rosy clouds that lie on either side of it, and herald its rising; their opalescent tints and pearly lights are beautiful to dim vision, to which the sun itself is too bright to be looked upon. Men will believe in a gentle Christ when they see you gentle. They will believe in a righteous love when they see it manifesting itself in you. You are 'the secretaries of God's praise,' as George Herbert has it. He dwells in your hearts that out of your lives He may be revealed. The pictures in a book of travels, or the diagrams in a mathematical work, tell a great deal more in half a dozen lines than can be put into as many pages of dry words. And it is not books of theology nor eloquent sermons, but it is a Church glowing with the glory of God, and manifestly all flushed with His light and majesty, that will have power to draw men to believe in the God whom it reveals. When explorers land upon some untravelled island and meet the gentle inhabitants with armlets of rough gold upon their wrists, they say there must be many a gold-bearing rock of quartz crystal in the interior of the land. And if you present yourselves, Christian men and women, to the world with the likeness of your Master plain upon you, then people will believe in the Christianity that you profess. You have to popularise the Gospel in the fashion in which go-betweens and middlemen between students and the populace popularise science. You have to make it possible for men to believe in the Christ because they see Christ in you. 'Know ye not that ye are the temples of the living God?' Let His light shine from you.

III. I remark again that as temples all Christian lives should be places of sacrifice.

What is the use of a temple without worship? And what kind of worship is that in which the centre point is not an altar? That is the sort of temple that a great many professing Christians are. They have forgotten the altar in their spiritual architecture. Have you got one in your heart? It is but a poor, half-furnished sanctuary that has not. Where is yours? The key and the secret of all noble life is to yield up one's own will, to sacrifice oneself. There never was anything done in this world worth doing, and there never will be till the end of time, of which sacrifice is not the centre and inspiration. And the difference between all other and lesser nobilities of life, and the supreme beauty of a true Christian life is that the sacrifice of the Christian is properly a *sacrifice*—that is, an offering to *God*, done for the sake of the great love wherewith He has loved us. As Christ is the one true Temple, and we become so by partaking of Him, so He is the one Sacrifice for sins for ever, and we become sacrifices only through Him. If there be any lesson which comes out of this great truth of Christians as temples, it is not a lesson of pluming ourselves on our dignity, or losing ourselves in the mysticisms which lie near this truth, but it is the hard lesson—If a temple, then an altar; if an altar, then a sacrifice. 'Ye are built up a

spiritual house, a holy priesthood, that ye may offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God—sacrifice, priest, temple, all in one; and all for the sake and by the might of that dear Lord who has given Himself a bleeding Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, that we might offer a Eucharistic sacrifice of thanks and praise and self-surrender unto Him, and to His Father God.

IV. And, lastly, this great truth of my text enforces the solemn lesson of the necessary sanctity of the Christian life.

'The temple of God,' says the context, 'the temple of God is holy, which (holy persons) ye are.' The plain first idea of the temple is a place set apart and consecrated to God.

Hence, of course, follows the idea of purity, but the parent idea of 'holiness' is not purity, which is the consequence, but consecration or separation to God, which is the root.

And so in very various applications, on which I have not time to dwell now, this idea of the necessary sanctity of the Temple is put forth in these two letters to the Corinthian Church. Corinth was a city honeycombed with the grossest immoralities; and hence, perhaps, to some extent the great emphasis and earnestness and even severity of the Apostle in dealing with some forms of evil.

But without dwelling on the details, let me just point you to three directions in which this general notion of sanctity is applied. There is that of our context here 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God? If any man *destroy* the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, and such ye are.'

He is thinking here mainly, I suppose, about the devastation and destruction of this temple of God, which was caused by schismatical and heretical teaching, and by the habit of forming parties, 'one of Paul, one of Apollos, one of Cephas, one of Christ,' which was rending that Corinthian Church into pieces. But we may apply it more widely than that, and say that anything which corrupts and defiles the Christian life and the Christian character assumes a darker tint of evil when we think that it is sacrilege—the profanation of the temple, the pollution of that which ought to be pure as He who dwells in it.

Christian men and women, how that thought darkens the blackness of all sin! How solemnly there peals out the warning, 'If any man destroy or impair the temple,' by any form of pollution, 'him' with retribution in kind, 'him shall God destroy.' Keep the temple clear; keep it clean. Let Him come with His scourge of small cords and His merciful rebuke. You Manchester men know what it is to let the money-changers into the sanctuary. Beware lest, beginning with making your hearts 'houses of merchandise,' you should end by making them 'dens of thieves.'

And then, still further, there is another application of this same principle, in the second of these Epistles. 'What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?' 'Ye are the temple of the living God.'

Christianity is intolerant. There is to be one image in the shrine. One of the old Roman Stoic Emperors had a pantheon in his palace with Jesus Christ upon one pedestal and Plato on the one beside Him. And some of us are trying the same kind of thing. Christ there, and somebody else here. Remember, Christ must be everything or nothing! Stars may be sown by millions, but for the earth there is one sun. And you and I are to shrine one dear Guest, and one only, in the inmost recesses of our hearts.

And there is another application of this metaphor also in our letter. 'Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?' Christianity despises 'the flesh'; Christianity reverences the body; and would teach us all that, being robed in that most wonderful work of God's hands, which becomes a shrine for God Himself if He dwell in our hearts, all purity, all chastisement and subjugation of animal passion is our duty. Drunkenness, and gluttony, lusts of every kind, impurity of conduct, and impurity of word and look and thought, all these assume a still darker tint when they are thought of as not only crimes against the physical constitution and the moral law of humanity, but insults flung in the face of the God that would inhabit the shrine.

And in regard to sins of this kind, which it is so difficult to speak of in public, and which grow unchecked in secrecy, and are ruining hundreds of young lives, the words of this context are grimly true, 'If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.' I speak now mainly in brotherly or fatherly warning to young men—did you ever read this, 'His bones are full of the iniquities of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust?' 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?'

And so, brethren, our text tells us what we may all be. There is no heart without its deity. Alas! alas! for the many listening to me now whose spirits are like some of those Egyptian temples, which had in the inmost shrine a coiled-up serpent, the mummy of a monkey, or some other form as animal and obscene.

Oh! turn to Christ and cry, 'Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest, Thou and the ark of Thy strength.' Open your hearts and let Christ come in. And before Him, as of old, the bestial Dagon will be found, dejected and truncated, lying on the sill there; and all the vain, cruel, lustful gods that have held riot and carnival in your hearts will flee away into the darkness, like some foul ghosts at cock-crow. 'If any man hear My voice and open the door I will come in.' And the glory of the Lord shall fill the house.

DEATH, THE FRIEND

'... All things are yours ... death.'—1 Corinthians 3:21-22

What Jesus Christ is to a man settles what everything else is to Him. Our relation to Jesus determines our relation to the universe. If we belong to Him, everything belongs to us. If we are His servants, all things are our servants. The household of Jesus, which is the whole Creation, is not divided against itself, and the fellow-servants do not beat one another. Two bodies moving in the same direction, and under the impulse of the same force, cannot come into collision, and since 'all things work together,' according to the counsel of His will, 'all things work together for good' to His lovers. The triumphant words of my text are no piece of empty rhetoric, but the plain result of two facts—Christ's rule and the Christian's submission. 'All things are yours, and ye are Christ's,' so the stars in their courses fight against those who fight against Him, and if we are at peace with Him we shall 'make a league with the beasts of the field, and the stones of the field,' which otherwise would be hindrances and stumbling-blocks, 'shall be at peace with' us.

The Apostle carries his confidence in the subservience of all things to Christ's servants very far, and the words of my text, in which he dares to suggest that 'the Shadow feared of man' is, after all, a veiled friend, are hard to believe, when we are brought face to face with death, either when we meditate on our own end, or when our hearts are sore and our hands are empty. Then the question comes, and often is asked with tears of blood, Is it true that this awful force, which we cannot command, does indeed serve us? Did it serve those whom it dragged from our sides; and in serving them, did it serve us? Paul rings out his 'Yes'; and if we have as firm a hold of Paul's Lord as Paul had, our answer will be the same. Let me, then, deal with this great thought that lies here, of the conversion of the last enemy into a friend, the assurance that we may all have that death is ours, though not in the sense that we can command it, yet in the sense that it ministers to our highest good.

That thought may be true about ourselves when it comes to our turn to die, and, thank God, has been true about all those who have departed in His faith and fear. Some of you may have seen two very striking engravings by a great, though somewhat unknown artist, representing Death as the Destroyer, and Death as the Friend. In the one case he comes into a scene of wild revelry, and there at his feet lie, stark and stiff, corpses in their gay clothing and with garlands on their brows, and feasters and musicians are flying in terror from the cowed Skeleton. In the other he comes into a quiet church belfry, where an aged saint sits with folded arms and closed eyes, and an open Bible by his side, and endless peace upon the wearied face. The window is flung wide to the sunrise, and on its sill perches a bird that gives forth its morning song. The cowed figure has brought rest to the weary, and the glad dawning of a new life to the aged, and is a friend. The two pictures are better than all the poor words that I can say. It depends on the people to whom he comes, whether he comes as a destroyer or as a helper. Of course, for all of us the mere physical facts remain the same, the pangs and the pain, the slow torture of the loosing of the bond, or the sharp agony of its instantaneous rending apart. But we have gone but a very little way into life and its experiences, if we have not learnt that identity of circumstances may cover profound difference of essentials, and that the same experiences may have wholly different messages and meanings to two people who are equally implicated in them. Thus, while the physical fact remains the same for all, the whole bearing of it may so differ that Death to one man will be a Destroyer, while to another it is a Friend.

For, if we come to analyse the thoughts of humanity about the last act in human life on earth, what is it that makes the dread darkness of death, which all men know, though they so seldom think of it? I suppose, first of all, if we seek to question our feelings, that which makes Death a foe to the ordinary experience is, that it is like a step off the edge of a precipice in a fog; a step into a dim condition of which the imagination can form no conception, because it has no experience, and all imagination's pictures are painted with pigments drawn from our past. Because it is impossible for a man to have any clear vision of what it is that is coming to meet him, and he cannot tell 'in that sleep what dreams may come,' he shrinks, as we all shrink, from a step into the vast Inane, the dim Unknown. But the Gospel comes and says, 'It is a land of great darkness,' but 'To the people that sit in darkness a great light hath shined.'

'Our knowledge of that life is small, The eye of faith is dim.'

But faith has an eye, and there is light, and this we can see—One face whose brightness scatters all the gloom, One Person who has not ceased to be the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His beams, even in the darkness of the grave. Therefore, one at least of the repellent features which, to the timorous heart, makes Death a foe, is gone, when we know that the known Christ fills the Unknown.

Then, again, another of the elements, as I suppose, which constitute the hostile aspect that Death assumes to most of us, is that it apparently hales us away from all the wholesome activities and occupations of life, and bans us into a state of apparent inaction. The thought that death is rest does sometimes attract the weary or harassed, or they fancy it does, but that is a morbid feeling, and much more common in sentimental epitaphs than among the usual thoughts of men. To most of us there is no joy, but a chill, in the

anticipation that all the forms of activity which have so occupied, and often enriched, our lives here, are to be cut off at once. 'What am I to do if I have no books?' says the student. 'What am I to do if I have no mill?' says the spinner. 'What am I to do if I have no nursery or kitchen?' say the women. What are you to do? There is only one quieting answer to such questions. It tells us that what we are doing here is learning our trade, and that we are to be moved into another workshop there, to practise it. Nothing can bereave us of the force we made our own, being here; and 'there is nobler work for us to do' when the Master of all the servants stoops from His Throne and says: 'Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; have thou authority over ten cities.' Then the faithfulness of the steward will be exchanged for the authority of the ruler, and the toil of the servant for a share in the joy of the Lord.

So another of the elements which make Death an enemy is turned into an element which makes it a friend, and instead of the separation from this earthly body, the organ of our activity and the medium of our connection with the external universe being the condemnation of the naked spirit to inaction, it is the emancipation of the spirit into greater activity. For nothing drops away at death that does not make a man the richer for its loss, and when the dross is purged from the silver, there remains 'a vessel unto honour, fit for the Master's use.' This mightier activity is the contribution to our blessedness, which Death makes to them who use their activities here in Christ's service.

Then, still further, another of the elements which is converted from being a terror into a joy is that Death, the separator, becomes to Christ's servants Death, the uniter. We all know how that function of death is perhaps the one that makes us shrink from it the most, dread it the most, and sometimes hate it the most. But it will be with us as it was with those who were to be initiated into ancient religious rites. Blindfolded, they were led by a hand that grasped theirs but was not seen, through dark, narrow, devious passages, but they were led into a great company in a mighty hall. Seen from this side, the ministry of Death parts a man from dear ones, but, oh! if we could see round the turn in the corridor, we should see that the solitude is but for a moment, and that the true office of Death is not so much to part from those beloved on earth as to carry to, and unite with, Him that is best Beloved in the heavens, and in Him with all His saints. They that are joined to Christ, as they who pass from earth are joined, are thereby joined to all who, in like manner, are knit to Him. Although other dear bonds are loosed by the bony fingers of the Skeleton, his very loosing of them ties more closely the bond that unites us to Jesus, and when the dull ear of the dying has ceased to hear the voices of earth that used to thrill it in their lowest whisper, I suppose it hears another Voice that says: 'When thou passest through the fire I will be with thee, and through the waters they shall not overflow thee.' Thus the Separator unites, first to Jesus, and then to 'the general assembly and Church of the first-born,' and leads into the city of the living God, the pilgrims who long have lived, often isolated, in the desert.

There is a last element in Death which is changed for the Christian, and that is that to men generally, when they think about it, there is an instinctive recoil from Death, because there is an instinctive suspicion that after Death is the Judgment, and that, somehow or other—never mind about the drapery in which the idea may be embodied for our weakness—when a man dies he passes to a state where he will reap the consequences of what he has sown here. But to Christ's servant that last thought is robbed of its sting, and all the poison sucked out of it, for he can say: 'He that died for me makes it possible for me to die undreading, and to pass thither, knowing that I shall meet as my Judge Him whom I have trusted as my Saviour, and so may have boldness before Him in the Day of Judgment.'

Knit these four contrasts together. Death as a step into a dim unknown *versus* Death as a step into a region lighted by Jesus; Death as the cessation of activity *versus* Death as the introduction to nobler opportunities, and the endowment with nobler capacities of service; Death as the separator and isolator *versus* Death as uniting to Jesus and all His lovers; Death as haling us to the judgment-seat of the adversary *versus* Death as bringing us to the tribunal of the Christ; and I think we can understand how Christians can venture to say, 'All things are ours, whether life or death' which leads to a better life.

And now let me add one word more. All this that I have been saying, and all the blessed strength for ourselves and calming in our sorrows which result therefrom, stand or fall with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is nothing else that makes these things certain. There are, of course, instincts, peradventures, hopes, fears, doubts. But in this region, and in regard to all this cycle of truths, the same thing applies which applies round the whole horizon of Christian Revelation—if you want not speculations but certainties, you have to go to Jesus Christ for them. There were many men who thought that there were islands of the sea beyond the setting sun that dyed the western waves, but Columbus went and came back again, and brought their products—and then the thought became a fact. Unless you believe that Jesus Christ has come back from 'the bourne from which no traveller returns,' and has come laden with the gifts of 'happy isles of Eden' far beyond the sea, there is no certitude upon which a dying man can lay his head, or by which a bleeding heart can be staunched. But when He draws near, alive from the dead, and says to us, as He did to the disciples on the evening of the day of Resurrection, 'Peace be unto you,' and shows us His hands and His side, then we do not only speculate or think a future life possible or probable, or hesitate to deny it, or hope or fear, as the case may be, but we *know*, and we can say: 'All things are ours ... death' amongst others. The fact that Jesus Christ has died changes the whole aspect of death to His servant, inasmuch as in that great solitude he has a companion, and in the valley of the shadow of death sees footsteps that tell him of One that went before.

Nor need I do more than remind you how the manner of our Lord's death shows that He is Lord not only of the dead but of the Death that makes them dead. For His own tremendous assertion, 'I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again,' was confirmed by His attitude and His words at the last, as is hinted at by the very expressions with which the Evangelists record the fact of His death: 'He yielded up His spirit,' 'He gave up the ghost,' 'He breathed out His life.' It is confirmed to us by such words as those remarkable ones of the Apocalypse, which speak of Him as 'the Living One,' who, by His own will, 'became dead.' He died because He would, and He would die because He loved you and me. And in dying, He showed Himself to be, not the Victim, but the Conqueror, of the Death to which He submitted. The Jewish king on the fatal field of Gilboa called his sword-bearer, and the servant came, and Saul bade him smite, and when his trembling hand shrank from such an act, the king fell on his own sword. The Lord of life and death summoned His servant Death, and He came obedient, but Jesus died not by Death's stroke, but by His own act. So that Lord of Death, who died because He would, is the Lord who has the keys of death and the grave. In regard to one servant He says, 'I will that he tarry till I come,' and that man lives through a century, and in regard to another He says, 'Follow thou Me,' and that man dies on a cross. The dying Lord is Lord of Death, and the living Lord is for us all the Prince of Life.

Brethren, we have to take His yoke upon us by the act of faith which leads to a love that issues in an obedience which will become more and more complete, as we become more fully Christ's. Then death will be ours, for then we shall count that the highest good for us will be fuller union with, a fuller possession of, and a completer conformity to, Jesus Christ our King, and that whatever brings us these, even though it brings also pain and sorrow and much from which we shrink, is all on our side. It is possible—may it be so with each of us!—that for us Death may be, not an enemy that bans us into darkness and inactivity, or hales us to a judgment-seat, but the Angel who wakes us, at whose touch the chains fall off, and who leads us through 'the iron gate that opens of its own accord,' and brings us into the City.