

The End of the Incarnation

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For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will but the will of Him that sent me; and this is the will of Him that sent me, that of all that He hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. — John 6:38-39

IN the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand our Lord presented Himself symbolically to man as the food of the soul. For, as Augustine reminds us, though the miracles wrought by our Lord are divine works, intended primarily to raise the mind from visible things to their invisible author, yet their message is not exhausted by this. They are to be interrogated also as to what they tell us about Christ, and they will be found to have a tongue of their own if we have skill to understand it. "For," he adds, "since Christ is Himself the Word of God, even a deed of the Word is a word to us." One of His miracles is accordingly not to be treated as a mere picture, which we may be satisfied to look upon and praise; but rather as a writing, which we are not content to praise though we delight in its beauty, but find no satisfaction until we have read and understood it. We may possibly consider somewhat fanciful Augustine's detailed decipherment of the signs in which this miracle is written. He discovers in it a complete parable of the salvation of man and of men. But we can scarcely refuse, as we read it in the pregnant record of John, to say in Pauline phrase, "these things contain an allegory."

As such, indeed, John presents it. This is the meaning of his care to tell us, as he introduces his recital, that "the passover was at hand": not a mere chronological note, we may be sure; nor yet merely an explanation of the presence of the multitude, gathered for the pilgrimage to Jerusalem; but a premonition of what is to come, John's account of the occasion and meaning of the miracle, which itself was the occasion of the great discourse on the bread of life. Christ, the true passover, chose the passover time, when men's minds were upon the type, to present the anti-type to them in symbol and open speech. It was therefore also that He tested His disciples with searching questions, designed to bring them to the discovery of whether they yet knew Him; and that He taxed the people that "signs" were wasted upon them (verse 26), and that while they were demanding a sign that they might see and believe (verse 30), the sign had been given them, and though they had seen, they did not believe (verse 36). It was therefore above all, that Christ followed up the miracle with the wonderful discourse in which He explains the sign, and declares Himself openly to be "the bread of God that cometh down from heaven and giveth life to the world." This is the tremendous truth which miracle and discourse united to proclaim to the multitudes gathered on the shores of Gennesaret at that passover season; but which, despite type and sign and teaching - each a manifest word from God, - they could neither receive nor understand. And this is the blessed truth which our text, - taken from the center of the discourse and constituting, indeed, its kernel, - presents to our apprehension and

belief anew to-day. May the Spirit of truth, who searches all things, even the deep things of God, illuminate our minds and prepare our hearts, that we may understand and believe.

I. Let us begin by observing the testimony borne by our Lord and Master here to His heavenly original and descent: "I am come down from heaven," He says. And the truth here declared is the foundation of the entire discourse : the whole gist of which is to represent Jesus as the "bread out of heaven," "the true bread out of heaven," "the bread of God that cometh down out of heaven," which the Father hath given for the life of the world. I need not remind you how this representation pervades John's Gospel, from the testimony of the Baptist (iii. 31), that He who was to supplant him "cometh from above," and is therefore "above all," to Jesus' own triumphant declaration at the close of His life, that, His work being finished, He is ready to return to the Father who sent Him, and to the glory that He had with Him before the world was (xvii. 5, II). Our present asseveration is but a single instance of the constant self-testimony of the Son of Man to His heavenly original and descent.

The older Unitarianism was prodigal of miracle. It was not the supernatural, but the mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the God-man that were its scandal. When brought face to face with such passages as these, it was wont, therefore, to explain that Jesus, born miraculously of His virgin mother, but a mere man, was taken up to heaven by the divine power to learn the things of God; whence He again descended to bring divine teaching to men. To the newer Unitarianism, on the other hand, it is precisely the supernatural which is the offence. Its philosophical forms might hospitably receive such mysteries as the Trinity and the God-man, if only they may be permitted to run freely into their moulds. But divine interventions of any kind, and most of all the descent of a personal God from heaven to earth, to be incased in flesh and to herd for a season among men, it cannot allow. It, therefore, attacks our passages with a theory of ideal, not real, preexistence, and teaches that Jesus means only that, in the thought and intention of God, His advent into the world had long been provided for, and that, in that sense, He was with God and came forth from God.

How weak, how inconceivable, all such expedients are before the majesty of Christ's self-witness: "I am come down from heaven." And when we turn over the pages of this Gospel, - the leading idea of which it has been said, inadequately indeed, but so far truly, is the Divine glory of Christ in the incarnation, - and observe our Lord's constant witness in the discourses recorded in it, not merely to His descent from the Father, but to His essential equality and oneness with God, to His eternal preexistence with Him, and to His prospective return to His primal glory with the Father, after His task on earth is accomplished, - how our spirits bow in worship before that God only-begotten who is in the bosom of the Father, who became flesh and tabernacled among us for a season full of grace and truth, and "declared" to us by His very existence among us that God, not only whom He came forth from, but whom He is.

II. We should not fail to observe, however, that the incarnation is not spoken of in our text, as an end in itself, but rather as a means to an end. The object of our Lord here is not to present the

bare fact of His having come down from heaven to the wonder of men, but to expound the purpose of His coming down from heaven. "I am come down from heaven," He declares, "in order that I may do the will of Him that sent me." You will scarcely need to be reminded that this, too, is the representation, not of our text only, but of the whole body of relevant deliverances recorded by John from the mouth of the Master, and indeed of the entire Gospel itself. Everywhere and always, it is not the coming down from heaven itself, but the purpose of the coming, that receives the emphasis. And this is why it is inadequate to say that the leading idea of John's Gospel is the glory of Christ in the incarnation. Its leading idea is, rather, the sufficient end of the incarnation, or, in other words, its leading purpose is to present what we may call a satisfactory philosophy of the incarnation.

And this is the precise amount of truth that lies behind the assertion so freely made by those who are stumbled by the heights of John's theology, that his Gospel is not a simple narrative of fact, but an ideological treatise, which, in their view, is equivalent to saying that it does not give us fact but fancy, and is to be looked upon not as a sober history but as a metaphysical essay. But does history cease to be history when it passes beyond the mere tabulation of events, and essays to marshal them according to their relations and under the categories of cause and effect? -when it ceases to be a mere chronicle, in a word, and becomes what we have learned to call philosophical history? And is it to be made a reproach to a writer of history that he has sought not merely to collect, but also to understand his facts; and to record them in such a way as to bring out their internal nature as well as their external form?

Bishop Alexander, in his delightful little book on *The Leading Ideas of the Gospels*, places the matter relatively to John's Gospel in a very clear light. "A great life," he reminds us, "cannot be rendered by a simple agglomeration of facts," "A great life, - a life whose words and works influence mankind profoundly, - is not sufficiently told by merely relating its facts and dates. What an enigma, for instance, is the life of Napoleon! How many of his biographies are mere masks, concealing those bronze features! We cannot understand any great and complicated life, good or evil, by merely recording the isolated events along which it moved. It is an organic whole, and must be reconstructed as such. . . . This, then, is the great Leading Idea of St. John's Gospel. Given the facts of Christ's life, how shall we bind them into unity, and read them as a whole? What theory of His Person and Nature will give us a logical and consistent view? What Christ did and said becomes explicable only by knowing what Christ is. . . . Some who have not lost all reverence for Christianity speak as if St. John's prologue added a difficulty for faith; as if St. Matthew or St. Luke on the incarnation were comparatively easy to receive. Is it so for those who think? Place side by side these statements. On the one side - 'when as His Mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.' On the other side, the four oracular propositions - 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh.' Which is easier to receive? . . . In St. John the fact of the Incarnation is lifted up and flooded with the light of a divine idea. If in the Unity of the Divine existence there be a Trinity of Persons; if the Second Person of that Trinity is to assume the reality of flesh, and the likeness of sinful flesh, we can in some measure see why He needed the tabernacle of a body, framed and moulded by the Eternal Spirit, to be His

fitting habitation. The mystery of a Virgin Mother is the correlative of the mystery of the Word made flesh."

Surely this is most admirably said. To be made quite perfect, it needs only the removal of the emphasis from the nature of Christ to the work of Christ. "If the Second Person of that Trinity is to assume the reality of flesh, and the likeness of sinful flesh." Aye, if Dr. Alexander leaves this "'if" hanging in the air. But not so John. To give an adequate account of it is just the object and chief end of his Gospel. We need to amend the postulation of the problem, therefore, so far as not only to insert, but to emphasize this element. " Given the facts of Christ's life, how shall we bind them together into unity, and read them as a whole? What theory of His Person and Nature, and Purpose and Work, will give us a logical and consistent view?" This is the problem that John's Gospel answers. And in answering it, it gives us a philosophy of the incarnation, and thus renders not only the incarnation itself, but all that Incarnated Life, not only credible but natural, and not only natural, may we not even say? but almost inevitable - impossible to be otherwise. And thus John fulfils the end of his writing: "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name."

III. What, then, is the account of the incarnation which this Gospel thus commends to us as its philosophy? We note at once that in our text our Lord states it, in the first instance, relatively not to man, but to God. The reason of the incarnation, rendering it credible, natural, inevitable, is traced back into the councils of the Godhead. "I am come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me."

The purpose of the incarnation is therefore primarily to please God the Father, and to perform His will. We cannot avoid the implication that the incarnated one comes, therefore, in a subordinate capacity. He came down from heaven not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him. He was sent. He was given a commission, a work, to do. How this conception is repeated over and over again in the discourses recorded by John! Even to John the Baptist He is the "sent of God" (John iii. 34). When Nicodemus approached Him as a teacher come from God, He explained that He was not come primarily as a teacher, but as one sent by God (iii. 17) to do a work. And this is the burden of the great discourses at the pool of Bethesda (v.23, 36), at the feast of Tabernacles (vii. 16, 18, 28, 29), on the Light of the World (viii. 16, 18, 29, 43), and as well of the closing discourses at the last passover (xvi. 5, xvii. 16, xviii. 33). In all alike Jesus is the sent of God, come not of Himself (vii. 28, xviii. 43) to seek His own will, but to do the will of Him that sent Him (v.30); and only when He had "accomplished the work given Him to do" (xvii. 4) to return to the Father who sent Him (xvii. 16).

Now this subordinate relation in which Jesus thus pervasively represents Himself to have stood to the Father, so as to have been sent by Him, must be a matter either of nature or of arrangement. It must be either essential or economic. It must find its account and origin either in the necessity of nature or else in the provisions of a plan. But side by side with this perfectly pervasive proclamation of His subordination to the Father, in the whole matter of the incarnation itself, and the purpose or "will" that lies behind that incarnation and gives it its justification and its philosophical account, there runs an equally pervasive

assertion by Jesus Himself and by His historian as well, of His essential equality and oneness with God. He was not only in the beginning with God: He was God. He is the only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father. To have seen Him is to have seen the Father also. He draws and receives from Thomas, the worshipping cry, "My Lord and my God." He declares to the Jews, "I and the Father are One." It seems to be clear, therefore, that the subordination in which the Father is recognized as greater than He, prescribing a "will " for Him to come into the world to perform, is economic, not essential ; a matter of arrangement, not of necessity of nature.

By such a representation we are, of course, carried at once back into the darkness, or, what is equally blinding, into the blaze of mystery. It may be thought that it is enough to be asked to believe in the mysteries of the God-man and of the Trinity, - that within the unity of the Godhead there exists such a distinction of persons that of each we may assert in turn that from the beginning he has been with God, and has been God. Are we to add this additional mystery of fancying the persons of the Godhead, though numerically one in essence and sharers in all the divine attributes, " acting," as Dr. Martineau puts it, "each on the other as outside beings and conducting a divine drama among themselves," - imposing tasks on one another, requiring conditions of one another, and earning favors from one another? No doubt it is past our comprehension. But do we gain or lose by denying its possibility, its reality? What does the Trinity mean, if it does not mean such a distinction of persons that each may say relatively to the other, " I," and "Thou," and " He"? What can the incarnation of the Second Person mean, if the persons may not stand over against one another in a measure far transcending our power to comprehend? And let us remember that John presents this conception to us, not as an added difficulty to faith, but as the philosophy, the explanation of the incarnation. It may well happen here, too, that two mysteries support and render credible each the other, - as two beams of wood, neither of which could easily stand alone, when bowed together not only support each other but provide a firm foundation upon which you may safely pile the weight of a slated roof. To adopt Bishop Alexander's mode of statement,- "If in the Unity of the Divine Existence there be a Trinity of Persons, and if the Second Person of that Trinity is to assume the reality of flesh and the likeness of sinful flesh," - is it an additional difficulty or an aid to faith in this supernal mystery to be further told that this colossal humiliation of the Son of God was not an objectless display of arbitrary power, nor yet a tentative and unconsidered effort of divine compassion to do somewhat, as yet undetermined in kind or amount, for sinful mankind, but the execution in time of an eternal plan, - a plan born of, and redolent in its every part with the infinite compassion of God, shaped in all its details from all eternity by brooding love, and now remaining only to be executed by each person involved taking and completing his appointed part in its tremendous work? The mystery of the covenant is the correlative of the mystery of the incarnation. Without its postulation the incarnation would present increased difficulties of belief. Without the added words, "In order to do the will of Him that sent me," the declaration, "I am come down from heaven," would remain a simple marvel and prove a strain on faith.

And now let us not fail to observe that it results from what we have said, that John's Gospel is the Gospel of the Covenant. If its leading idea is not merely the glory of the incarnation, but the philosophy of

the incarnation; and if that philosophy runs back into an economic arrangement or plan between the Persons of the Trinity, by which the Second Person comes to perform a work committed to Him by the Father, not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him this is but another way of saying that the leading idea of John's Gospel is the idea of the Covenant. And is it not so? Search and look, and you will find not only that this covenant idea recurs again and again throughout the Gospel, with a frequency and an emphasis which throw it well into the foreground, but that the book, as a whole, is moulded in its form and contents upon it. The burden of its first chapters is Christ's testimony that He has come because sent by the Father; the burden of the last chapters is His approaching return to the Father who sent Him ; the accomplished work lies between. And therefore it is that when Nicodemus came to Him at the opening of His ministry and asked for teaching, Jesus pointed him rather to His work, and declared the doctrine of regeneration itself "an earthly thing" compared with the heavenly mysteries He had to tell, - those mysteries of His descent from heaven (iii. 13), sent by the Father (iii. 17) to save the world (iii. 16). And therefore it is that in the midst of His ministry He opens this great discourse from which our text is taken, by declaring that the Son of Man has been "sealed," appointed and set apart, by the Father for the work of giving eternal life to men ; and when His disciples stumbled at the height of the great truth involved, - that He had come down from heaven to give His flesh as the food of the soul, - He sorrowfully added, "What, then, if you should see the Son of Man ascending where He was before?" And therefore it is that at the end of His life He compares His finished work with the joy a woman has after travail, when at length the child is born (xvi. 21); and declares that, having accomplished the work which the Father gave Him to do (xvii. 21), the covenant condition is fulfilled, and the covenanted reward is at hand, and He is about to return to His primal glory. John's Gospel, - we ought not to miss it, - is the Gospel of the Covenant.

IV. How our hearts should burn within us as we approach the last and most central question of all, and ask what is our Lord's account of the nature and terms of this mysterious but most blessed covenant, to fulfil the conditions of which He came down from heaven. We observe at once, - and with what emotions of gladness we ought to observe it, - that it concerns the salvation of men. And equally at once we observe, with still swelling emotion, that it is complete and perfect in its provisions, - that it provides for an entire and finished, for a sure and unfailing salvation. And we observe that this involves - as of course it must involve - the consequence that it is definite and precise in its terms, - that it contemplates a definite and particularly designated body of men. "And this is the will of Him that sent me, that of all that He hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day." The will of the Father which Christ came down from heaven to do, concerned, then, not all men, but some men "All that He hath given me." And His will with reference to these, which He sent the Son to perform, was not the making of some indefinite provision looking toward their rescue from sin and shame, but the definite, actual, complete, and final saving of them : that "I should lose nothing of it, but should raise it up at the last day."

Let our hearts stand still while we read these great provisions. It is the testimony of the covenanted Son Himself, as to the terms of the covenant which He came to fulfil, that it had a definite and well-defined subject, - a restricted subject if you will, a "limited" subject, - not all mankind, but a given body of men, - a

given body of men who, in the text, are brought into explicit contrast with those who, though they saw, yet believed not, because they could not come to Him except the Father drew them, and He draweth none but those whom He hath given the Son and for the saving of whom the Son came down from heaven: a precisely determined body, therefore, "particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished." But it is as well - and it could not be so at all, unless it were "as well" - the testimony of the covenanted Son Himself to the terms of the covenant which He came to fulfil, that it had a definite and fully-determined end, - not merely the rendering the salvation of men possible; nor merely the removing of the legal obstacles in the way of the salvation of men; nor merely the breaking down of whatever difficulties may stand in the path of the free outflow of God's love to men ; much less merely the introduction into the world of a better example of life than had hitherto been before men, or of a new divine force making for righteousness; or the impressing of men with a deeper sense of the love of God for them, or of His hatred of sin; but the actual, complete, and sure salvation of all that the Father had given the Son: "This is the will of Him that sent me, that all that He hath given me, I should lose nothing of it, but should raise it up at the last day."

In a word, we have presented to us here, in these pregnant words, not only in outline, but in all its essential details, what has come to be known among us as the Covenant of Redemption. Men may, no doubt, find fault with this doctrine. They may say, as they have said, that thus our Lord, the Saviour of the world, is made not the Saviour of men, but only of a small, select company of men. It does not appear with what justification the number of those purchased by His precious blood is represented as small, when John represents them as an immense multitude whom no man can number. But when the alternative is - as the logical alternative assuredly is - limitation of the saving work of Christ, either in its subjects or in its substance, who, on either Biblical grounds or on grounds of Christian hope and love, can hesitate one moment in his decision ? If the work of Christ is not complete, if it did not purchase for us a sure salvation, the charter of our redemption is gone. It has sometimes been thoughtlessly said that this doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption is an invention of the Reformed Theology. A distinguished professor at Andover, Dr. Park, was accustomed to tell his pupils that the Covenant was made in Holland in the middle of the seventeenth century. And a distinguished Baptist teacher, Dr. E. G. Robinson, has lately assured the religious public that the Covenant theology has been finally entombed in the grave of Charles Hodge. But not only had the doctrine of the covenants already come to its rights and been made the architectonic principle of theology, long before Cocceius published his Sum of the Doctrine of the Covenants, (1648) - for to him was Dr. Park alluding, - and indeed been so used, before his supposed discovery of it, in so representative a symbol as the Westminster Confession : - but from the beginning of that new discovery of the way of salvation which we call the Reformation, it had been a prominent feature in the teaching of Reformed theologians in every land. And we may well believe that it is destined to remain the central stronghold of faith to the end of time, among all who in simplicity of heart draw the matter of their teaching out of this record of our Saviour's words. For what element of the doctrine is lacking here? "I am come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me": there is the assertion of an economic arrangement as the precondition of the incarnation, and of the prestipulation of the incarnated work. "And this is the will of

Him that sent me, that of all that He hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day": there is the revelation of the contents of the pre-incarnation arrangement, and the provision through the incarnation for the certain salvation of a chosen body of lost men. "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me"; "No man can come unto me except the Father which sent me, draw Him": there is the twin definition of the subjects of the salvation. Or, if we desire further witness than this one passage, it is spread fully on the pages of this Gospel. Let us attend only to those calm and final words which, as His work was accomplishing, our blessed Redeemer addressed, not to us men, but to His Father, in a divinely assured assertion of His righteous claims upon the fruit of His work. "Father, the hour is come: glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee: even as thou gavest Him authority over all flesh, that to all that thou hast given Him, He should give to them eternal life. . . . I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I manifested thy name unto the men whom thou didst give me out of the world: thine they were, and thou didst give them to me. . . . I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me. All His work is in fulfilment of an arrangement with the Father; and the whole of it, down to this High-Priestly prayer itself, making intercession for His own, concerns, primarily and in its chief import, not the world, but those whom the Father gave Him out of the world, and secures beyond failure their complete salvation. This is the whole doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption : the Reformed theology has grasped it, and teaches it; but it has not added one single thought to it.

And now let us bask a little, before we close, in the comforting assurances of this blessed teaching.

1. How the love of God is magnified to us by this teaching. It is not from a yesterday only that He has busied Himself with our salvation. In the depths of eternity our foreseen miseries were a cause of care to Him. In that mysterious intercourse between Father and Son, which is as eternal as the essence of Godhead itself, we - our state, our sin, our helplessness, and the dreadfulness of our condition and end, - were a subject of consideration and solicitude. What a God this is that is unveiled before us here. A God of holiness : a God so holy that even in the abyss of eternity-past He could not rest indifferent to the sin which was only after the lapse of innumerable ages, to dawn in this corner of the as yet unexistent universe. A God of justice : a God so just that already His indignation burned against the as yet uncommitted sin of such petty creatures of His will as man. But a God of love: a love so inconceivably vast as already in the profundity of the unlimited past to brood over unimaginable plans of mercy toward these few guilty wretches among the numberless multitudes of His contemplated creatures. When the Psalmist raised his eyes to the heavens above, the work of the fingers of the Almighty, and considered the moon and stars which He had ordained, he was lost in a natural wonder that so great a Creator should concern Himself with so puny a creature: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man that Thou shouldst visit him?" But how much greater a marvel is before us now. It is not man as man, - a weak and puny creature - that we have to consider; but man as sinner, - this weak and puny creature become vile and filthy, offensive and hateful to a holy and just God. It is not in contrast even with the grandeur of the worlds circling about worlds which

crowd the depths of the heavens and dwarf the consequence of this speck of earth on the skirts of the universe which is our home, that we are to consider him but in contrast with the majesty of the increate Triune maker of all that is. It is not simply that God has taken notice of this sinful, puny creature, that we have to consider; but that the All-Holy and All-Blessed God has felt care and solicitude for his fate and looked not at His own things in comparison with his. What indeed is sinful man that God should love him; and before the foundations of the world should prepare to save him by so inconceivable a plan as to give His only-begotten Son as a ransom for his life! My brethren, this is not to the glory of man, but to the glory of God; it is not the expression of our dignity and worth, but raises our wondering hearts to the contemplation of the breadth and length, and height and depth of the love of God that passeth knowledge.

2. And how our appreciation of the perfection of the work of our Saviour is enhanced by this teaching. As it was upon no sudden caprice that He came into the world, but in execution of a long-cherished and thoroughly laid plan, so it was no partial work which He performed, but the whole work of salvation. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." And this He has accomplished, even to the uttermost. When He cried upon the cross, as His agony went out in the darkness of death, - a death for us - in those words of deepest import and of mighty power, "It is finished!" - when in His great sacerdotal prayer, he proleptically declared that He had "accomplished the work" which the Father "had given Him to do," and was now ready to lay aside His humiliation and reenter His glory: the precise thing which He published as "finished" and "accomplished," was salvation. All has been done by Him. His saving work neither needs nor admits of supplementary addition by any needy child of man, - even to the extent of an iota. When we look to Him we are raising grateful eyes, not to one who invites us to save ourselves; nor merely to one who has broken out a path, in which walking, we may attain to salvation; nor yet merely to one who offers us a salvation wrought out by Him, on a condition; but to one who has saved us, - who is at once the beginning and the middle and the end of our salvation, the author and the finisher of our faith.

What can we possibly need that we do not find provided in Him? Do we hopelessly groan under the curse of the broken law, hanging menacingly over us? Christ has "redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us" (Gal. iii. 13). Do we know that only he that worketh righteousness is acceptable to God, and despair of attaining life on so unachievable a condition? Christ Jesus "hath of God been made unto us righteousness" (I Cor. i. 30). Do we loathe ourselves in the pollution of our sins, and know that God is greater than we, and that we must be an offence in His holy sight? The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin (I John i. 7). But do we not need faith, that we may be made one with Him and so secure these benefits? Faith, too, is the gift of God: and that we believe on Him is granted by God in the behalf of Christ (Phil. i. 29). Nothing has been forgotten, nothing neglected, nothing left unprovided. In the person of Jesus Christ, the great God, in His perfect wisdom and unfailing power, has taken our place before the outraged justice of God and under His perfect law, and has wrought out a complete salvation.

3. What an indefectible certitude of salvation is given by this great teaching. If Christ Jesus came to save and has saved, how can salvation fail? If the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ro. vi.

23), how can this eternal life thus freely given go out in time, and fail to accord with its very designation as eternal? If Christ has undertaken not merely to open a way of salvation to us, but to save us; if He came into the world for the precise purpose of performing this will of God, "that of all that He hath given Him, He should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day," - what possibility lies open of the failure of this great design, framed in eternity by Triune Godhead, and executed in time by none other than the strong Son of God? Therefore our gracious Lord assures us: "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." And, therefore, His servant, condescending to the weakness of our fears, argues with us: "God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more, then, being justified by His blood, shall we be saved from wrath by Him." Oh, the certitude in that "much more." "If God be for us," he argues again, "who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him, freely give us all things? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" O weak and trembling soul, can you not find, not courage merely, but certitude in this? What matters your weakness? Your salvation rests not on it, but on God's strength. He loves you; He determined to save you; He sent His Son to save you; He has come to do it: He has done it. You are saved: it cannot fail, unless God's set purpose can fail; unless Christ's power to save can fail; unless His promises of love can fail.

4. What a clear ground of assurance of salvation is furnished by this great teaching. Does some wayward spirit say: "All this is true only of the elect, those whom the Father gave to Christ. And I, alas! how may I know that I am of the elect?" Ah, self-tormenting soul, why expend strength in prying into God's secrets, instead of taking Him at His word? It is true indeed that it is only those whom He has given to Christ that Christ has saved; and the comfort, as the salvation, is for them alone. But it is not true that God requires of you election for salvation, or offers you predestination as the way of life. He offers you not predestination, but Christ; and He requires of you not election, but faith. Do you make election itself a ground of doubt and despair? This, says an old Puritan, is indeed to gather poison out of the sweetest of herbs. "God," says he, "layeth it as a duty upon every one to repent and believe, to come to Him and he shall have rest to his soul. . . . If, then, thou believest, thou repentest, this may be a sure testimony unto thee of thy everlasting glory." So, then, "it's no wonder," he continues, "that Paul doth often run out in large expressions concerning God's love, his predestination from all eternity" - note how he identifies the two - "when he hath occasion to praise God for the calling and conversion of any in time; for this is to trace the stream till we find its well-head." "Madmen" is what John Calvin calls those "who seek their salvation in the whirlpool of predestination; not keeping the way of salvation which is exhibited to them." "To every man," he explains, his faith is the sufficient proof of the eternal election of God; and it would be a shocking sacrilege to carry the inquiry behind it: for an aggravated insult is offered the Holy Spirit if we refuse to assent to His simple testimony."

Election does indeed lie at the root of our salvation but faith is the proof of election. Are we saved? The question is resolved in this: Do we believe in Jesus Christ? Christ indeed says, "This is the will of Him who sent me, that of all that He hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day." Here is election the root of the saving work of Christ. But have you failed to note or to remember that he

immediately adds: "For, this is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son and believeth on Him should have eternal life, and that I should raise him up at the last day." Here is the work of Christ received in faith the ground of salvation: and here is faith, laying hold of Christ, the evidence of salvation. And, therefore, it is not only said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me," but it is immediately added: "And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." These words are gracious enough in their broadest sense to send a thrill of joy through the heart. But there lies hid within them a further delicate grace which is lost in the English translation. The word for "come" is so varied in the two clauses as to lay the stress in the first instance "upon the successful issue of the coming, the arrival," and in the second "on the process of the coming and the welcome." "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me" - shall certainly and unfailingly reach me. "And him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out" - "him that is in the process of coming," - yea, even though he is but just begun, with weak and faltering steps, even such an one as this who is but beginning to come - "I will in no wise cast out."

What a blessed assurance, when faith is made thus not the ground of salvation, not the condition of salvation, but its evidence! It is here that the sweet herb of election begins to pour forth its refreshing cordial. Men may tell us, indeed, "Believe and you shall be saved," while still making faith the ground or the condition of salvation. And, then, with what dreadful solicitude will we pluck up our faith over and over again by the roots, to examine it with anxious fear: Is it the right faith? Is it a strong enough faith? Do I believe aright? Do I believe enough? Shall I abide in my belief until the end? Dreadful uncertainty! Inexpressible misery of ineradicable doubt! It is only when we have learned from such words of our Master as those before us to-day, that we dare say to our souls not only Believe and ye shall be saved! but those other words of deeper meaning and fuller comfort, caught from the Master's own blessed lips: Believe and ye are saved! "Verily, verily, I say unto you," says our Saviour in words which sum up previous teachings (John iii. 18, 36): "He that heareth my words and believeth Him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment but hath passed out of death into life." Blessed John, who so caught his Master's words and recorded them for us. When faith is thus made not the ground or the condition, but the evidence of salvation, our eternal bliss is no longer suspended in any sense on aught that we are or do, but hangs solely on the work of Christ, doing His Father's will. Faith, even faith, as the ground or condition of salvation, may be also the ground of despair: but faith as the proof of salvation is the charter of assured though humble hope. It takes hold of the "strong Son of God, immortal love," and of the indefectible purpose of Almighty grace which cannot fail or know any shadow of turning. This we owe to that doctrine of the eternal covenant which our blessed Saviour reveals to us in the words on which we have meditated to-day. Because of its blessed provisions we can cry joy to our souls, though they tremble with natural fear and can scarce believe that Christ will save such faithless souls as they. Though they have faith but as a grain of mustard-seed, they are saved already. For, this is the will of Him who sent our Redeemer, that of all that He gave Him, He should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day: for this is the will of the Father that every one that beholdeth the Son and believeth on Him should have eternal life and He should raise him up at the last day.



