

Sunday Reading.

ASSOCIATIONAL SERMON

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The Attraction of the Uplifted Christ.

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me."—John xii. 32.

Looking to Jesus as Son of God and thinking of His divinity, we are overwhelmed with the thought of His infinite condescension and humility. "Being in the form of God, He thought equality with God not a thing to be grasped, but made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross."

But looking again to Jesus as Son of Man with our thoughts upon His humanity and the conditions of that human life, we are at times almost equally amazed at His lofty self-confidence—the assurance of authority and power which He manifested.

Is the man of Nazareth anything more than one who has a devil and is mad? then is he greater than the greatest among the sons of men.

The fire of His divine personality ever and again breaks and flashes through that veil of human flesh in which he is enveloped, showing itself as an intolerable egotism to those whose hearts—untaught of God—recognize in him nothing more than the son of Joseph the Galilean carpenter.

Emotions of wonder that deepen into worship cannot fail to fill our minds to-day as we read the words of our text and consider the circumstances under which they were uttered.

These are the words of one who stands almost alone in the presence of his enemies. To a degree it is true Jesus had won the favor and confidence of the people. Multitudes had been attracted by his preaching and his miracles.

There were not a few who were in a measure persuaded that he was that Christ who should come into the world. There were some among the upper class, a few even among the rulers who had believed on him though secretly. And there was a small but devotedly attached band of followers, who, though they could not fathom his deep sayings or comprehend his purposes, yet loved and trusted with fullest confidence and most entire surrender of themselves to his service.

On the other hand, to the common people at large with their thought and hope directed to a material Kingdom of Heaven, his profoundly spiritual teachings were incomprehensible. Wrought up at times to a great pitch of enthusiasm, the multitude were ready to take him by force and make him a king, but presently, they were offended at his preaching of spiritual truths which they had no ears to hear, no hearts to understand.

His enigmatical utterances repelled them, his hard sayings sent them away. But the ruling and controlling class at Jerusalem, Chief priest and scribe and Pharisee—were united against him. To them his attitude was utterly offensive, his teaching intolerable, his influence alarming.

Their opposition grew daily more determined and more malignant. Only his blood would satisfy them now. They had decreed that he must die. Standing thus alone, without family prestige or wealth or worldly influence, without friends or following on whom he could depend in any conflict with his enemies, this peasant man, from obscure and despised Nazareth, stands there alone in the midst of Jerusalem—with Jerusalem against him, and utters this prediction, so grand in its divine self-confidence and freighted with immeasurable blessing for this sinful world.

EXALTATION BY THE CROSS.

A place of highest glory belongs to Christ. His name is above every name. To Him every knee shall bow. To Him every tongue confess that He is Lord. He is to draw all men to Himself. He shall put every enemy

under His feet. But this height of glory must be reached by the way of the cross. It was necessary that the Son of Man should suffer many things, and be rejected and be crucified. He that ascended above all principality and power is the same as he that descended first into the lower parts of the earth.

It is a profound principle that true exaltation can be attained only through humiliation. The material world is full of analogies of this truth. Look at the wheat field waving in the summer breeze, and giving the glory of its golden fruitage to the sickle of the harvester. Whence has it come? Months ago, in the spring time, many grains of wheat were cast into the ground, and died and rotted there in the darkness, and from that humiliation has come the golden glory of the harvest-time. Look at the egg of a beautiful bird. The egg is beautiful too in form and in color. Shall we not take it and give it a place upon our mantel shelf that we may enjoy its beauty for a time? Nay, we will not so rob it of its glory. Let it remain in the darkness of the nest, unknown and unadmired. Let the mother bird brood upon it. The egg will lose all its beauty. It will become vile. The lovely shell will be crushed, but see! out of that vile, crushed shell there comes a wondrous thing—a bird with beautiful plumage and power of song—a living winged thing that mounts up into the air and sings its song in the heavens.

The world is full of such illustrations. Scarce any living thing, plant or animal, great or small, begins its course in the light.

To these analogies our human world conforms. "He that will save his life shall lose it, but he that will lose it the same shall keep it to life eternal." And the Son of God became truly Son of Man. The Word which was in the beginning "became flesh and dwelt among us." The Divine Christ "became flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone," and "was found in fashion as a man." And it was through this voluntary and unreserved acceptance of the conditions of our life, and through his loyal and unswerving obedience to its law that the Son of Man attained the ineffable height of His glory. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name." "He hath set him far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name which is named not only in this world, but in that which is to come."

There are days of extraordinary significance in every life—days into which weeks or months of life seem crowded. And in proportion to the fulness and strength of the current seen in the ordinary life do these extraordinary days appear significant. What interest must attach then to such days—and there were many such—in that always wondrous life of Jesus. Such a significant day it was in the life of our Lord on which He gave utterance to the words of our text. An event had occurred which seemed as a way-mark indicating to Him that the great crisis of His early life was near at hand. Certain Greeks, having come up to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, had come to one of the disciples with a request that they might see Jesus. The disciples had presented the request and it had called forth immediately from their Master these words: "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." His mission to Israel had in one sense failed. The Jews were about to reject their King. He had come unto His own and His own had received Him not. But the Word of God was not to return void. A wider mission and a greater glory opened now to the vision of Jesus. But who shall tell what conflicting tides of intense emotion surged through His soul in that hour? How dreadful was that moment to the Son of Man when He cried: "Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour." The troubled soul shrinks back from the gloom of that black valley of death, so dreadful is that cross even now flinging its shadow over him. It passes—that sublimely tragic moment, fraught with the destinies of a sinful world, all its hope, and all its despair,—it passes, and

we hear words of a prayer which is at the same time a song of triumph in which loyalty and love blend in holy harmony—"Father, glorify Thy name."

Nothing that poets' pen, or artists' pencil has ever attempted to portray, is more worthy of everlasting remembrance than the scene which that moment presents. How calmly, how passionlessly the story of our Lord's life is now read, in the quiet of peaceful homes, in the staid repose of churches, or in the shadowy grandeur of the great cathedral, where the story of the cross is made to mingle in æsthetic harmonies with "the dim religious light," through "storied window" coming, with the great organ's pealing note, and the chaste music of the full-voiced choir, with the measured intonation of ancient liturgies and the polished eloquence of the sacred orator. But, ah, my friends, could we, preachers of the word, catch glimpses of the true significance of moments such as this, could our eyes be opened to behold the chariots and the horsemen that fill these mountains of God, should not the holy fire so fill our hearts and purge our lips that those who hear us, like that wedding guest, who heard the tale of the ancient mariner could not choose but bearken. Could we but enter into the meaning of that hour when the Son of Man contended with the Powers of Darkness,—could we measure what issues, for Him and for us, for earth and for heaven, hung upon the decision of that conflict. Could we conceive the measure of blessing and of glory with which that prayer is fraught, when He cries as the signal of victory in His wrestling with Death and Hell, "Father glorify thy name"—we should see that it was altogether harmonious with the character of this ineffable moment that the voice from Heaven should come then and the Most High declare, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." Yet were these gross souls then with ears dull of hearing, and hearts slow to believe who said—it had thundered. There were others with ears more attentive to hear and hearts more apt to understand who said, "An angel has spoken to Him." But who among all the multitude knew that it was the voice of God speaking unto men? Has the world grown wiser and more attentive now? Are the ears of men grown more quick to hear, their hearts more apt to understand when God speaks from Heaven, as He still does speak—telling us that the pathway to Life and Light and Glory, for every son of man, lies by the way of the cross, that he who would attain unto the resurrection from the dead must know the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ, that he who would be a sharer in Christ's joy and glory must drink of His cup and be a sharer in His baptism. "He that hath an ear to hear let him hear." We come now to consider more closely the prediction concerning the Uplifted Saviour. It began to be fulfilled on that very day when Jesus was lifted up upon the cross, Jerusalem turned its gaze that day to the cross of Jesus. The Roman soldiers who nailed Him to the accursed wood, parted His raiment among them, cast lots for His vesture—then sitting down they watched him there—hands, eyes and hearts grown but too sadly callous to such cruel scenes. The robbers also, crucified with Him, turned to Him, the one with railings and reproach—the other in prayer and faith. Passers-by look up and greet Him with jibe and sarcasm, wagging their heads and saying, "Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days—save thyself." Chief priests and Scribes and elders drawn thither also—mock and revile, saying, "He saved others—himself he cannot. He is the King of Israel let him now come down from the cross and we will believe on him." But there were others who drew near and came, hearts that were groaning in anguish for their love of Him, spirits that in their measure were drinking of His cup. Hatred is bold and strong—so also is love. The thoughts of many hearts were that day revealed. The mother was standing there. The beloved disciple was there whose head so little while ago had leaned on his Lord's breast at the supper. And, gazing from a distance, with eyes that see but dimly through their tears, with hearts that falter in hope but not in love, stand those Gall-

lian women who had followed Him and all His acquaintance.

As it was that day so has it been since then. Wherever the Cross has been planted and the crucified Christ lifted up there men have been drawn towards Him. But not all in the same manner nor in the same degree.

THE ATTRACTION OF THE EYE AND EAR.

There are those who are drawn by the most superficial attraction—drawn as to the eye and ear only. Many there are in Christian lands who regard the Crucified Saviour with that stony gaze of indifference with which the Roman soldiers looked upon Him. But even such men cannot, though they would, put themselves outside the attraction of the uplifted Christ. As well might a planet think to escape the influence of the sun. Men are feeling that attraction and their natures are yielding in some measure to its influence when they know it not. Every church-spire pointing upwards is a token to them of Him who came down from Heaven and was crucified for men. The face of the Uplifted One looks out upon them from every Christian home. It is reflected upon them from the face of every Christian man and woman whom they meet. The Spirit of Christ is breathed from all the avenues of a Christian society. Though their hearts be as hard as the beaten pathway on which the seed falls only to be devoured of birds, yet must they be drawn in some measure towards the Christ. Though they hate the name of the Crucified One as bitterly as did those who reviled Him when He hung upon His cross, yet must they see, as did those enemies of old, the people casting their garments in His way and hear the hosannas of the children who sing unto His name. Men must see the triumphant procession of the Son of Man, though it be only to gaze upon the sight with stupid indifference, or to gnash their teeth thereat in impotent rage.

Men whose minds the God of this world has blinded, whose hearts have grown callous through long unbelief, who never willingly entertain the thought of Christ, whose tongue never utter His name, except it be to give a more dreadful emphasis to their profanity, do yet sometimes show that they are not totally oblivious to the thought of Christ. When death has entered their houses, they are ready to offer a prayer, in the name of Christ, offered in the presence of their dead. And when their time to die shall come—can they die without thinking of Him who was crucified? They will at least desire that the last words which shall be uttered over their dead bodies, shall fall from Christian lips.

ATTRACTION OF THE INTELLECTUAL NATURE.

Nothing has so stirred the intellectual life of the world as the revelation of "the Word made flesh." Nothing has done so much to enlighten the minds of men as this clearer shining of the "True light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

The cross of Him who is both the light of the world, and the life of men has become for humanity what the sun is to the material world, a centre both of radiation and attraction. It is of the attraction of the cross that we speak to-day. Our view of this part of our subject must be a rapid one, and we must deal with it principally by way of suggestion.

Directly, or indirectly, every form and every faculty of man's mental energy has felt the inspiration of Christ.

It would be impossible to tell or even to conceive the degree in which the æsthetic side of the world's intellectual life has felt this influence. Every art and every department of human life, into which this element enters, has felt the touch of the Crucified One. The architect, as he has builded, and the sculptor, as he has chipped and chiseled, have felt the attraction and the inspiration of the cross. The artist has received a divine inspiration because the radiance streaming from the Cross has fallen upon his canvass. The poet's eye has rolled with a finer phrensy as it has caught the face of the Uplifted Christ, and, directly or indirectly, the sweetest and sublimest strains of his song have drawn their inspiration from the Cross. Music, most divine of arts, has received a Christian baptism; and

human song has thrilled and palpitated with an energy of inspiration unknown until there was breathed into it the spirit of Him who was crucified.

Turning now to the more sober and prosaic, and what we sometimes, though perhaps wrongly, regard as the more serious and important side of the life of the world, we find that here also, in no less measure, has the attraction of which we speak been felt. The minds of men in their soberest and most serious thinking have turned toward the Christ—contemplating the life which He lived and the death which He died—life and death so interwoven in purpose and results that the one can be comprehended only in relation to the other; and have wondered, in their thinking, at the immeasurable and uncontrollable influences and energies which have had their source and drawn their potency from the cross of Christ. Nor has it been the monk only in his solitude or the Christian minister or the learned divine who have felt this attraction and whose minds have been busied with these thoughts. All thinking men in greater or in less degree have had their minds drawn toward the Uplifted One. The historian has felt continually the spell of that presence. The statesman too has acknowledged it. Even the philosopher in his profoundest searchings has not escaped it. That cross of Christ photographs itself on every thinking brain.

What a problem for the world is this abiding fact of the cross of Christ. Now and again a man rises up and boasts to the world that he has compassed the mystery, declaring it is no mystery but a superstition, and that the power of the cross to attract the intellectual life of the world is henceforth to cease. But the next generation, if not his own, has called him a fool and forgotten him, and the greatest minds have continued to acknowledge the mystery and to bow to the supremacy of the cross.

In this age of books, biographies of men are multiplied, few of which find many readers. Fewer still are held in remembrance to be read by the next generation. Now and then, indeed, comes a man whose life demands to be written a second time, perhaps even a third or fourth time, if he has lived in some great crisis of the world's history, and especially if in his life and deeds there has appeared some more than ordinary reflection of the meaning and mystery of the cross. But ever since that day on which the Son of Man was lifted up from the earth, one might almost say, the world has been trying to write His biography. Every generation has a new Life of Christ to write. Nay, every passing year adds to the number of those histories, and every writer believes that he has something new to tell. Then when his book has been written he feels that it is more a failure than a success because the story cannot be told.

Wherever the light of Christ comes, it touches and fills and vivifies, according to the measure in which it is received, the whole life of men. A vigorous intellectual life in the people, wherever it is found, answers to that life which is the light of men. It feels its attraction and its inspiration. India and Japan are beginning to receive that light and the intellectual life of the people to feel its influence.

Chunder Sen and Mozoomdar are names which have reached our ears of men whose minds have felt the attraction and the quickening of the life that is in Christ. And these names stand in truth not alone but as representatives of many others whose intellectual natures, at least, are responding to the same divine energy.

May we not see in these men, as Jesus saw in those Greeks who came up to Jerusalem, the sign and promise of a grand extension of His power over the minds and also the hearts of men?

ATTRACTION OF THE HEART.

But the Uplifted Son of Man exercises over men an attraction far more intimate and profound, more influential and richer in blessing than those of which we have spoken. There is an attraction which touches the eye and ear, there is that which reaches the intellect, but there is an attraction which reaching deeper lays hold upon the heart and brings all its treasures under contribution. It arouses repentance and calls forth faith; it begets gratitude

and inspires love, and finally welds the willing soul with all its powers and interests to Christ.

We may surely believe that it is the desire of the Lord Jesus so to attract and so to bind all men to himself, that he who has been drawn as to eye and ear shall be drawn also as to his intellect, and that he who has advanced thus far shall go farther and experience the power of that attraction which unites the soul to Christ in saving faith and love. Alas for those who falter and halt on the way. Alas for the wayside places and the stony ground and that which is full of thorns. But we will bless God to-day for the good ground and its harvests waving wide and rich to the glory of God. We will be glad for the good and honest hearts which have received the Christ, and with Him power to become the sons of God.

It is an inspiration for us, to think how great and goodly a company from all the generations and all the peoples to which Christ has been proclaimed have felt the power of this deeper attraction.

In this present age, too, as we rejoice to believe, millions of souls are being drawn to the Uplifted Christ and bound to Him by bonds more tender and enduring than any other the human heart can know. Here, before me to-day, I am glad to believe, are not a few representatives of that great company, redeemed and purified by blood.

Do not your hearts thrill to remember the day when they were drawn burdened with their sin and sorrow to the cross, and do not your hearts burn within you with a holy gladness as they respond to the attraction of Him who was uplifted on that cross?

We do well to rejoice to-day with great and grateful exultation in the triumphs which Jesus has won over the world and over us, in drawing human hearts unto Himself. But we believe that it is the purpose of our Lord to bless the world with larger measures of His life and light than it has yet received. We look for greater things and must continue so to do, while uncounted millions of our fellow men have not in any degree felt the attractive influence of the Crucified Christ, and while so many who have hebel and heard, wonder and despise and perish, because they have not known that deeper drawing of the heart, by which alone the soul can receive salvation.

Surely we may believe that both extensively and intensively this glorious prediction of our Lord is to have a wider and a profounder fulfillment.

We can do no other wise than hope and pray that the blessing may come in all its height and depth—in all its length and breadth. Shall not all those of Japan and India come? Shall not the unknown millions of China and Africa behold our Saviour. His gospel, shall it not be preached in all the world? The heathen, are they not given to Him for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth, are they not His possession?

Let the church then, in these latter days, watch and wait in prayer and expectation for larger endowments of that power from on High. Let us expect another and a greater Pentecost, that in the energy of that new baptism of fire, the church may rouse herself from her lethargy, shake herself from the dust of worldliness, and, with wealth, talents, learning and every gift consecrated to the service of her crucified Lord, gird herself anew in His name for the glorious strife.

Then shall she appear as one "clad in beautiful garments," and "great grace shall be upon her." So shall she "go forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

Sometimes we grow complacent over the thought of what the church is doing for the world. May it not concern us rather to think how little she is doing in comparison with the powers and opportunities which God has placed in her hands? Multiply those powers and opportunities by the energy and devotion of an apostle Paul, and how many years should go by before it could be said, even in the light of the geography and the ethnical knowledge of the 19th century: "The gospel has been preached to every creature under heaven."

But before that day can come there must be a larger fulfilment of the