

The Visitor's Pulpit.

A Two-Fold Aspect of Christian Life.

SERMON PREACHED BEFORE THE WESTERN ASSOCIATION, HELD AT ROCKLAND, CARLETON CO., JUNE 25, 1879, BY REV. J. T. MATON.

TEXT.—Col. iii. 3: "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

The human mind, dissatisfied with its own limited range, seeks ever to overstep the bounds of the known—to revel in the regions of the unknown.

For looking into and investigating the eternal its power is inadequate. To penetrate the boundless regions beyond the known requires more than human powers.

Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection? That the Lord Jehovah is high above us is true; but that he has spoken to us is also true. His throne, indeed, is in heaven; but he condescends to dwell in the contrite heart.

The vastness of his wisdom and the extent of his knowledge reach beyond the philosophy of the ages, and yet to the one asking he gives liberally and upbraids not.

The heavens declare his glory, and the flower of the field—the lily of the valley—the fowl of the air—the fish of the sea—speak his skill. And in all these he is revealed in one or another of his attributes.

Wonderfully pleasing is the thought that all earthly relationships and conditions may contribute to make real spiritual relationships and conditions; and this the more, since the human mind is so constructed that it obtains its knowledge more by comparison than in any other way.

The truths of God's word come to us illustrated and enforced by material things, and coming thus, they come through an atmosphere suited to our vision—through windows which reflect resplendent rays of light into our souls. Coming thus, they reach and penetrate our inmost natures, revealing to us what would otherwise be above our comprehension and beyond the grasp of our intellect. And well it is that God thus comes, and not in trumpet tones of thunder pealing among the mountain tops—not in angel whispers, soft as an evening zephyr, telling in language which no man knoweth, his kindness and mercy; for thus he would not have reached the human ear or touched the human heart. In words of tenderness through the medium of human converse, fraught with all the wisdom of adaptation, which could characterize so wonderful a presentation of goodness and love as the Bible is to man, He has come, and for it we bless his name.

Of that wonderful book, much has been said in its favor. But it needs a word; it speaks for itself. Do you object, and say that it deals too largely in experience—that it contains too many figures of speech—is not sufficiently explicit—leaves too much room for inference.

Does it? Suppose you take out of the literature of the present day all figure, and illustration, and incomprehensible expression, and what is left? It would be as if gladness were taken out of the world, or joy out of the human heart. There would be left only a mere abstract of former self—a mere relic of previous greatness and grandeur.

The Bible has in it, it is true, much that is incomprehensible. But incomprehensible by us, only because of the finiteness of man.

In making known its marvelous and divinely conceived ideas, it was needful that it should use that without which heaven could not be brought to man, nor man raised to heaven. It might have contained less of it, had it a less divine mission to accomplish. But coming as it does to reveal God and divine things, it is not too replete with simple expression, nor too full of wisdom in illustration.

Our text is one of those strong and impressive passages, which make bold statement of a sublime and impressive truth. Paul had no quibbling spirit. He could stand square to the truth he had been taught, and put it plainly. He could state fairly the Christian condition.

From the context we learn that when you were buried with Christ by baptism you declared your death, or that you died with him. When you rose from that liquid grave you said, I walk in newness of life. "If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above," and for this very reason, that ye are dead to the world and alive to Christ.

Ye are dead to sin and alive to righteousness; therefore make it manifest that ye are risen with Him. To you and to me,

my hearers, this text appeals, and it says of us, if we are Christ's, we are dead, and our lives are hid with Christ in God. Do we realize it? Do we feel its power? Do we understand its meaning?—What does it mean?

Does it mean that the Christian is set apart from every influence, twice dead, plucked up by the roots, and cast out forever?

If we see a fallen, withered, dried up tree, we have no difficulty in understanding that from it the life principle, as we call it, has gone out. If we see a man who has become so impervious to all good influences, whether through the intoxicating cup or lust, as to be unmoved by any of the ennobling motives which elevate the soul and lead the whole man into a higher and nobler life, we say of such a one, he is dead. And he is dead, so far that he is incapable of exerting, or being affected by, any good influence. His mother may implore him to weep over him, and his sister fondly entwine her arms around him and whisper a sister's love in his ear; but neither a mother's tear nor a sister's caress affect him! As with might the tear fall upon a stone and the caress be given to a tree, for there is no mortal principle within answering to the power without.

He who is born again is dead to wrong motives—to unworthy desires—to evil principles. Once he was alive by the law, now he is dead to sin and alive to Christ. Formerly he did evil that good might come; now he does no evil because good has come. Before, he walked in darkness, because he knew not the light; now knowing the light, he walks in the light, and stumbles not, because the true light has shined into him.

This death is a death which steals a man to the fierce attacks of the Devil. When he suggests departure from the truth, there is no living principle within answering to the temptation without.

Younder lie the lifeless remains of a noble human form. But a little while ago it was invigorated by a noble spirit. It had a heart that forced life-giving blood through all its arteries—a countenance beaming with intelligence—a hand delicate and tender, the grasp of which sent warm impulses through your whole being. If you spoke to him there was the ready and genial reply. With that person you held pleasant converse, and felt that he understood your conversation and was interested in your communications. There was something within answering to you. But go now and speak your tenderest utterances, and give the warmest grasp of your hand, and let fall upon him your sunniest smiles, and press to his lips your sweetest kiss,—and you start back sad and unsatisfied, for there is no living heart leaping to meet yours; there is nothing within answering to you without. You can go to him no more. You can counsel him no more, you can commune with him no more; he is dead.

Thus is the Christian dead. Temptations may come with all their cunning devices—with all the art and artifice of Satanic wisdom; but they are shorn of their strength, and, because they appeal to a dead man, they find no response. They meet that, for which they have no affinity. They find in the Christian's heart no answer to their unholy call. There is no warm response from within answering to the temptation without, for the Christian is no longer under law to sin, but under grace. The new life-principle, like a living tree stretching out its roots to the stream and extending its boughs to the sun, takes possession of the soil of the heart, and manifests itself in the acts of the life.

The question which comes to us, in view of the text, is, Are we dead—i.e., does sin rule over us? or has it lost its power over us? Are we under law to it, or have we died to sin and become alive to God?

We may perhaps best answer this inquiry by asking what principles govern our actions? How do our lives gravitate? Do our characters rest on right principles as their basis? Do we seek good because we love the good? Do we follow the right because we are governed by right principles, or simply because we fear the result of wrong doing? Do we speak the truth to our neighbors because we love truth, or because we expect to gain by it some object otherwise unattainable? Do we deal rightly with our fellows because we love the true balance and a just weight, or do we weigh justly because it is more to our credit and of a higher state of social honor to do so?

If from purely unselfish motives we do what there is for us to do in life—if we

do good because the good in us seeks outward manifestation; if we love God and hate evil; if we abhor sinful ways and unholiness, because they are not congenial to us, then have we died unto sin, and sin no longer rules over us. Then we have reason to believe that we have been changed in heart, purified in motive, cleansed in desire, and in the nobleness of our purpose, if we manifest a generous benevolence, kindness, forbearance, and Christian love, that shall be convincing proof to all who ask a reason of the hope that is within us, and that we have indeed died unto sin and are made alive unto God.

It may not be amiss for us to enquire—though we may not successfully answer—How far can a Christian man consistently seek worldly honor and emolument? To what extent can a man be overreaching in business and not overstep the bounds of Christian honesty? How close can a man shave in a bargain and not cut through? How much or how little can he color a transaction and still be honest? How much of time and talent can he devote to worldly pursuits, and how much reserve for his Christian calling? How much of a man's property, or what per cent of his profit, really belongs to God?

These grave and important enquiries, however, arise from a misconception of what is the real position of the Christian in his relation to the world—so we think. Are the Christian's relations to God and to the world antagonistic? Is he really called upon to do what is inconsistent with Christianity? Can he rightfully be said to have distinct interests, and that some of them are distinctly Christian, therefore it is impossible for him to perform them with a Christian spirit? We think not. We believe that the Bible teaches that the duties of the Christian never conflict. In Christian life Christian duties harmonize. The Christian's time, talent, property, himself—yea, all belong to God. And there can be no question as to God's requiring these to be used for His glory. Christian duty is always connected with God's glory; and whatever may be done which cannot be considered Christian duty. However or wherever the Christian tries to serve himself during the week, or distinctively worldly principles, and on Sunday to serve the Lord on distinctively Christian principles, he is ever met fair and full with the words, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Do you not, my hearers, know that often the dwarfed or feeble Christian owes his miserable condition to the fact that he has made a mistake just here. While God has made it his duty to do all with an eye single to His glory, he has been separating and placing on one side of the line things that are not Christian, and to which he supposes the law of Christ does not apply at all—on the other side those things which are distinctively Christian; thus obliging himself to decide how much shall be devoted to the one and how much to the other, never recognizing that he is not under two masters—that in truth one is his Master, even Christ—and that in view of this his whole life is to be one of Christian service. It may be that some, kneeling at the family altar, seek a Heavenly Father's love and watch-care, and imploringly solicit guidance and aid, and yet they have so separated the avocations of life from Christian service, that they turn the key and enter their counting rooms or open the gate and walk in the street, all unconscious that in all these things God may be with them by his Providence, guiding the affairs of every-day life, and as he numbereth the hairs of their head, so also marks the work of their hand and knows the number of their transactions, the measure of their skill and the extent of their doings.

Let the abiding presence of God go with the broker to his dealing in money, with the merchant to his sales of goods, with the farmer as he sows the seed and gathers the harvest, with all Christian men in all the avocations of life, and soon the motto that "Business is business" will give place to that affirming that business is duty, and that all affording to the Christian is Christian duty.

Let all Christian men have such a sense of moral excellence and Christian purity as will lead them to do all things as stewards of the grace of God, subjects of a holy King—children of a Heavenly Father. Let every hour bring with it the impression that we are not our own, that we are bought with a price; that it is ours to glorify God in body and in spirit, which are his; that all we do should be done to the honor of Him who should be glory upon the hills and spreads out his

beauty in the valleys, and says to his people, "Ye are mine, I have redeemed you." I shall allow each one of you to answer to your own conscience and to God whether you are dead to sin and living no longer therein, or not, simply praying that the fruit of your life may be holiness.

Life hid with Christ in God. Mark the expression, "life hid." This word—life—how expressive! How suggestive of anxiety, study, and mental expenditure! Much time, talent, and energy have been expended in efforts to explore its hidden mystery. But after all the accumulation of ages in science and philosophy—in synthesis and analysis—the keenest mind still regards life in the animal, life in the vegetable—as still hidden—still a mystery—stable—a remarkable something known in its results, but not comprehended in itself. It might therefore be true that Paul said of this life principle which all animals and plants have, that it is hid with Christ in God. Yet we hesitate not to affirm that the life Paul means is the life principle which is given of God to men when they are made new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is the new life which they receive who receive Christ. It is that which comes to a man whose faith embraces the living Redeemer. It is that which turns the wanderer back to God—that which turns his face towards the land that is fairer than day. It is that which has awakened in the hitherto cold and sluggish heart, pulsations warm and tender which throb in unison with Christ's heart and beat warm with his own love.

The Christian's life may well be said to be a hidden life in the sense that it is not seen—is only known in its results.

It is also a hidden life in the sense of its being with Christ; i.e., Christ its source, its sustenance, yea, really itself. For Christ is not only the way and the truth, but the life also. The Christian is alive, but it is Christ's life in him, even as the sap of the vine is the life of the branch abiding in it. Christ being its source, it must be supplied by him and flow from him to us. Christ sustains it, and we are dependent for its continuance and must look to him for the keeping up of the vital current that flows through us, invigorating and strengthening, making us living, growing, fruit-bearing plants in the garden of the Lord, whose leaf withereth not, and who, living, live unto the Lord, and not unto men.

God has given us the assurance that it will be continuous, for, as Paul puts it to the Corinthians, "If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." And Christ said, according to John's gospel, "because I live, ye shall live also."

It is the union with the living vine which shall keep the life we have received, which is eternal life. We may therefore think of this life that is hidden with Christ as eternal. It thus differs from the life which is the vital spark of the inanimate clay, and superior to it as the soul is superior to it as the soul is superior to the body. Like a river, small at its source, but widening out in its course to the sea, it shall widen until it reaches the unending future of the great God.

It is known in its results. What, therefore, are the results by which we may judge that this life is in us, or that our lives are hid with Christ in God? As a good tree brings forth good fruit, so also will there be good results from the life within which will show themselves without, in act and word.

We judge a tree to be alive if there are leaves on it in their proper season. So, if we hear words and see acts of love toward Christ, and of faith in him, we judge that there is some spiritual life.

If the tree shall have, besides leaves, rich fruit, sweet to the taste as well as pleasant to the eye, we judge that there is real life within. We could no more believe that the tree is dead than that it is not a tree at all.

So when there are seen in our lives works in obedience, in giving, in relief for the suffering, in helping the infirm, in caring for the sick, in comforting the distressed and doing good to all men as far as lieth in his power, we judge that a principle of life has been planted in that man, and is developing itself into a new life, which is the product of that character, which is as a well of water springing up into everlasting life. This life is with Christ, which assures us that it is safe keeping. Which commits our souls into his care, and we have confidence and hope towards Him for he is able to keep that which we have committed unto him against that day. Therefore we need not fear but delight ourselves in the

Lord, coming to him with inspired confidence, rejoicing that it is no vain or fleeting thing, but a tangible something, a principle within that shall be proved by its own fruits, such as are mentioned by Peter when he says: "Add to faith virtue, to virtue temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity." For these things being in a man, they make him that he be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If of therefore alive to Christ is to have his life in us, is to live his life, is to have that without which we have no life, is to have a life opening into a blissful future, unsealing all the treasures of God to us, putting us into communication with the Divine mind and unfolding to us its mysteries, satisfying our longing for something beyond this life, it is infinitely valuable to us, and worth a lifelong struggle to obtain.

You who are alive to Christ have received the life-giving power which causes your heart to leap up toward God as you reach out to him your arms of faith and call him yours. Henceforth you can claim Christ your Elder Brother, your helper and friend. Even now lift up your heads and rejoice, and go on from day to day in acts of Christian duty, trusting him who is the bright and the morning star, the one altogether lovely. Having Christ for your portion you have all things, for in him dwells all the fulness of Godhead. Living in him, feeding upon him, trusting in him, the promises shall support in every time of need. Let then, all hearts be opened to him who waits an entrance that he may abide there forever. And especially, O Christian, listen thou to the voice that speaks from heaven, that says to thee, thou art dead and thy life is hid with Christ in God, and let the response of the world and soul be that being dead to the thing and alive to Christ, thy fruit shall be unto holiness and the end everlasting life. For of thee the Lord says:

"Fear not, I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine; When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee, when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee, for I am the Lord, thy God."

Brethren, at this, our annual gathering, let us enquire what is our condition as a denomination, with reference to this two-fold aspect of the Christian life? Are we dead to the world and alive to Christ? During the past year there have been some indications of life in fruit bearing, some of our churches have received showers of Divine blessing, resulting in an increase of numbers, and no doubt spiritual strength, not all have been so blest, but we trust all have been endeavoring by persistent, consistent Christian effort and Christ-like deportment, to show to the world a deadness to it and to Christ a being alive to him, realizing that the formation of Christian character is the great work for the professor of the religion of Jesus to attend to. Acts speak louder than words. Always for Christ, in every act Christ's witness. "Ye are my witnesses saith the Lord." This cannot mean simply uttering a few words in the church, however good they may be, or however needed it may be to utter them. It includes the whole life,—once a witness always a witness, once witnessing always witnessing. We do not look for absolute perfection, but for such Christian character as shall make us living epistles known and read of all men, such beacon lights as shall indicate to the world the dangers of the rock-bound coast of sin, such a light of the world that it shall discover the bowlders of iniquity, and see the way to heaven, to God, glory.

By the illuminations of the Holy Spirit may we behold, love, and follow, more than ever before the Christian's great light and guide, Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

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