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VISION OF HIS FACE.

Sunday Discourse by Dr. Chapman, the Noted Pastor-Evangelist.

The Christian World Has Ever Been Living in the Hope of This Promise.

NEW YORK CITY.—The following sermon is one prepared for publication by the Rev. Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman, America's best known evangelist, who is now preaching to overflowing congregations in this city. It is entitled "A Vision of His Face," and is founded on the text, Rev. xxii: 4, "And they shall see His face."

The Apocalypse, or Revelation, as it is more frequently called, is supposed to have been written A. D. 95 to 97, and thus for 1800 years the Christian world has been living in the hope and inspiration of this text of Scripture. The glad cry of the faithful everywhere has been:

"As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness."—Psalm xvii: 15.

I wish we might see Him now. We have had hints of His beauty, and little glimpses of His glory, but oh, to behold Him! We are greatly indebted to the artists of the world for what they have shown us of their vision of His grandeur. "Christ Before Pliate" was a picture so real that a little girl, when she looked upon it wanted to be lifted up that she might untie His hands. Hoffman's "Christ in the Garden" is such a masterpiece that one can not look upon it without having his emotions stirred to the very depths. Paintings have certainly done their work. They have stirred the imaginations of the people. They have strongly impressed the beauty of His character upon hearts everywhere. They have fixed the thoughts of men upon Him. They have drawn the Christian nearer to Him, and they have done much to stimulate fellowship with Him always. Some, indeed, have been won to Christ by simply looking upon them. Count Zinzendorf, founder of the Moravian settlement, said that the deepest impression that was ever made on his life came to him when looking upon a picture of the sufferings of Christ. He saw these words underneath:

"I did all this for thee; what hast thou done for Me?"

And yet, valuable as they are, they are not to be relied upon because they are not ancient enough. The early Christians shrank from any material presentation of a human Christ, and thus it is that art, as we have it to-day, has passed through certain definite stages.

In the earliest age Christ was presented by the use of symbols. The representation of the fish was to draw attention to Him who made men fishers of other men. The drawing of a vine was to draw the attention to Him who said, "I am the vine." The picture of the cross was supposed to fasten the thoughts of the people upon Him who was its willing victim.

The second stage of art was the use of Old Testament types. In the picture of Moses striking the rock, one could see a representation of Christ, who said: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." In the sacrifice of Abraham both the love of God in the gift of His Son, and the love of the Son in the gift of Himself shone forth. In the three children in the fiery furnace there is a perfect representation of the Son of God seen in the form of the fourth, "which was like unto the Son of God Himself."

In the third stage of art New Testament allusions were used, and a shepherd became a picture of Christ, who was "the Good Shepherd," the "Great Shepherd" and the "Chief Shepherd."

In the eighth century men began to paint His likeness as they conceived it, but it is easy to understand that these representations could not be reliable because every trace of His physical appearance was lost. Not a syllable in the Gospels or the Epistles tells us how He looked when He walked upon the earth. Why is this? Surely the disciples had not forgotten His appearance. It may be for several reasons: First, because the first ages of the church were distinctly spiritual, and they would shrink from anything that would make Christ even seem to be material. Second, they never thought of Him after His departure as the afflicted one or the suffering one, but they saw Him at the right hand of God in the glory, and as they had no power to present a picture of Him there, so they had no inclination to present Him in His humiliation. Third, because they still felt His presence with them. They had no need to put His face upon canvas. I would a thousand times rather have the picture I carry about with me of Christ, which no artist has ever painted, or ever can paint, which I could not describe to you in words, even if I had the tongue of an angel. It is far beyond any earthly art. The early disciples must have felt this. Fourth, it may be that because when they saw Him after the Resurrection He was so different from what He was before that they could not paint the first picture, and they would not try to paint the second.

And yet we do know much about Him. It would not have been difficult to tell how Stephen looked. We have but to read Acts vii: 55, 60—"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. * * * And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this he fell asleep." So it is with Jesus Himself. We have had some hints of His beauty in the legends of old. The story of St. Safronica; of the handkerchief used to wipe His face as He went to Calvary, upon which the impression of His face was left, and which was to be seen as it unfolded in the presence of Mary, His mother. This is Romish, and has no foundation in fact. The story of one Publius Lentulus, who was said to be President of the people of Jerusalem, to the Roman Senate, runs thus:

"There came one among us, tall in stature, beautiful in appearance, His hair wavy and crisp and falling down over His shoulders. His brow, broad, smooth and most serene. His face without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. His nose and mouth faultless. His beard abundant and hazel color like His hair. His eyes prominent and blue. In denunciation, terrible; in admonition, calm and loving. He was never seen to laugh, but often to weep. His hands beautiful to look upon. In speech, grave, reserved, modest. Indeed, He was fairer than all the sons of men."

All this is beautiful and interesting as a legend, but it is said that there was no such office as President of the people of Jerusalem to the Roman Senate, and that Publius Lentulus never lived.

Why all this absence of Christ in marble and Christ upon the canvas? Why is it that the pen has never described Him so that we might reproduce His face? It certainly must all be of God. One reason may be in order that we might know that He belongs to the wide world, and to no race of men in particular. If He were known to be white, the black man might feel that He was not in sympathy with him. If He were known to be black the white man would certainly feel a barrier between them. But as it is, He is Jesus, the Light of the world, and the Caucasian, the Mongolian, the African, all can say together: "Fade, fade each earthly joy, Jesus is mine." And yet, there are phrases of Scripture which seem to give us hints not to be passed by silently.

I. HIS FACE SET TO JERUSALEM.

Luke ix: 51—"And it came to pass when the time was come when He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

He loved the city of Jerusalem, but at the time He went toward it, it was a city of shadows, and every step He took was into the deepening shadow of Calvary's cross. I need not describe His going. He was like a conqueror. In the very way He trod the streets of the city, and walked the highway of the land He loved, He was filled with courage, and when He beheld the city He wept over it. Take this as a picture and there is nothing finer in art. Take it as a sentiment, and there is nothing deeper in human pathos. Take it as a revelation of God, and no one need be afraid of Him. Philosophy may speculate about Him and try to reconcile His two natures; theologians may attempt to define Him as being infinite, eternal and unchangeable, but the common man grows confused, and all that he can say is that the One to whom he has given his soul is the Son of God, who was divine enough to go to Jerusalem in the very face of death, and human enough to be blinded with His tears as He looked upon the city. He knew all about the suffering of Jerusalem from all eternity, and yet He went on. When He ate the Passover and spoke of the one who should betray Him, He knew what was coming, and still He went on. When Pilate mocked Him He knew it was but the forshadowing of the sufferings of the cross, but still He went on. When He endured the pain of the scourging He knew that this was but the beginning of agony with which the pain of the cross was not to be compared because it was so great, and yet He went on. The world has never seen such a conqueror as the Son of God, "who died that we might live."

II. HIS FACE IN THE DUST.

Matt. xxvi: 36-39—"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here and watch with Me. And He went a little farther, and fell on His face and prayed, saying: Oh, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

In the thirtieth verse we read that when they had sang an hymn they went out. How simple, and yet how profound the meaning!

There never had been such a going-out before; there never has been such a going-out since. From the supper He made His way with the faithful few to Gethsemane, where the agony was so great that Gethsemane has stood for suffering ever since.

"Oh, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me!" I wonder why the cry? Some one has said it was because He was about to be branded as a sinner, treated as a sinner, put to death as a sinner, and it was His horror of sin that wrung the cry from His soul. Yet we have trifled with it, and sin has always been the same, is to-day, and shall be till the end of time.

Dr. Gregg tells of a story in Fox's Book of Martyrs, where a Christian was to die a most horrible death—being placed in a sack filled almost with venomous reptiles. As he looked at it he said:

"I can stand this for Jesus' sake."

Yet when they put him in the sack and he felt the first touch of the reptiles upon his face he gave a shriek of agony that could not be described.

It is said that no one has ever really known what prayer is until he has learned of the Spirit to put into practice this one offered in Gethsemane. It is not the kind that is offered to the congregation, or that is said at the bedside before we close our eyes in sleep; it is the kind that is crushed out of us. It is the cry of the Syrophenoecian woman, "My daughter is greviously vexed of the devil." It is the cry of Jesus in Gethsemane, "My Father, let this cup pass from Me."

You say, "What! His Father and all His suffering?"

Yes, His Father, still, and yours, also. In the midst of an agony that may have almost broken your heart, you might have cried: "My Father!" When there was not a hope in your life you might have whispered, "My Father!" And if the cry had come from the heart you would have gotten as quick a response:

"Be still, and know that I am God."

III. HIS FACE SPIT UPON.

But there is still another picture of His face in the New Testament. Matthew xxvi: 62-68—"And the high priest arose, and said unto Him, Answerest Thou nothing? What is it which these witness against Thee? But Jesus held His peace. And the high priest answered and said unto Him, I adjure Thee, by the living God that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou has said; nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then they did spit in His face and buffeted Him, and others smote Him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophesy unto us, Thou Christ, who is he that smote Thee?"

Have you noticed how quiet He was in all the mockings and the scourgings? It must have been because of the Gethsemane experience. There are scenes in our lives that make talk a sacrilege. When you came back from following your child to the grave, or reached your home after being at the new-made grave of your mother, not a word was spoken; the house was as still as the tomb where they rested. A night with God would have the same effect. They may spit upon Him and strike Him, but He feels it not, for while He walks the earth He lives in heaven. Paul found this out: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." 2 Cor. xii: 2-4. And yet in point of fact Paul was lying at the gate of Lystra. People though him dead. His back was bleeding. His whole body was bruised. It is a possible thing for us to be transfigured by the power of God, and become insensible to every earthly experience. Just as when the hell-hounds were let loose against Jesus Himself, and they smote Him and spit upon Him, they never touched Him.

IV. HIS FACE HEREAFTER.

We have hints as to what He is to be like in the hereafter. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."—2 Cor. iv: 6.)

We are told how He will appear to the sinner: "For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"—(Rev. vi: 17.) There was a time when as they smote Him they covered His face: "And some began to spit on Him, and to cover His face, and to buffet Him, and say unto Him, Prophesy: and the servants did strike Him with the palms of their hands." (Mark xiv: 65.) But not now. His eyes pierce His beholder through and through and their unforgiven sins in awful procession pass by. The cry of the lost soul is "Mountains and rocks, fall upon us, and hide us from His face." "And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them." (Rev. xx: 11.) This passage gives another touch to the picture, and what a change there is! Once there was in that face that which brought little children to Him, and made women love Him; and now the very earth and the heavens have fled away from Him. "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil."—(1 Peter iii: 12.) God's words are always true. Let him that hath ears take heed.

We are told just a little as to how He shall appear to the saint. "For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm xvi: 10, 11.) We have hints of this joy here. We have left this pleasure because of His fellowship in this world. We have had these experiences, which have been like single notes dropped from the songs of heaven. But they shall be gathered all together there in one grand anthem of praise, and we shall be filled with the peace of God for evermore.

V.

We have also some hints as to how this vision shall affect us when we see Him. John says: "I fell at His feet as dead."—Rev. ii: 17. It is supposed that the vision was so startling, the face so sublime. Just as men in this world are overpowered because of some wonderful experience, so John fell before Him in the skies.

The transfiguration scene is another representation. "And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them; and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias, talking with Him. Then answered Peter and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." (Matthew xvii: 1-4.) Peter said, "Let us live here forever." In this he was but expressing the longing of every Christian heart that beat after his, and what Peter longed for God had promised to give us. Jesus at the transfiguration is an exact picture of Jesus as He stands in glory, and as we shall see Him in eternity.

Right Kind of Christianity.

Christianity, says Dr. Washington Gladden in his "The Christian Pastor," is not merely for Sundays and prayer meetings, for closet and death bed; it is for shop and office, for counting room and factory, for kitchen and drawing room, forum and council chamber. And Dr. Gladden intimates that one reason that the allegiance of the world to Christianity is not more general is that too much attention has been given to Christianity as a scheme for getting people safely out of the world, and too little to insisting on how they shall carry themselves in the world. Christianity must not be relegated to a secondary place—that is no place. The law of love is not a sentimental maxim. St. James called it the royal law—the law regent everywhere, every while, in every relation to everybody. The whole creation groans and travails together until now, in need of such a Christianity.

How to Have the Best.

In God's service the only gain is in accepting that which God chooses for us day by day. Whether it seems to be what we most shrink from, or what we should welcome as most desirable, God's choice is sure to be best for us, and in the end we shall find it so. God knows our need, and He is ready to supply it. We are often mistaken as to what is best for us, but God never makes a mistake. If we realize this, and act accordingly, we do wisely. Any other course on our part is a mistake for which we shall surely suffer. As quaint George Herbert says:

"If thou do ill—the joy fades, not the pains.
If thou do well—the pain doth fade, the joy remains."

Highest Wisdom.

To recognize and frankly to accept the limitations of life is part of the highest wisdom. There are some things we may know, and others we have no means of discovering. There are some things we may experience, and for others there is no material to build the experience.—The Rev. Dr. Slicer, New York City.

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