

Printed Pamphlets

Promise Substantiated and God Revealed in Grace

Luke 4:14-32

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God; to have part or lot with those who deny the doctrines of scripture, would be high treason against God, and Christ who is *The Truth*. "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity," defines the course of faith and loyalty to Christ as clearly as could be.

The Lord has very graciously raised up a fresh witness to this truth in the author of "The Down-grade," and all who love the truth must rejoice in the faithfulness of his protest against the tide of the so-called new theology, which threatens to flow over every hitherto supposed barrier; moreover the storm which his distinct and straightforward utterance has raised, is in itself an evidence of the corruption which is at work; this, and the treatment he has received, prove his case: it has ever been true that in a day when truth faileth among men, "he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey." May the Lord increase the number of those who are faithful to Christ in such days as are now upon us.

But the prospect suggests, in the second place, not only the refusal absolutely of what is false, but the maintenance as absolutely of what is true; and not only this, but that distinctive part of it, "in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Now is it not of the deepest moment to observe, that in the very portion of scripture which defines the path of faith and faithfulness, in days when faith is left off, the distinctive portion of the truth, which alone can sustain, is placed in the foreground, and so the apostle says to his son Timothy, "But thou hast fully known my doctrine" -- and then afterwards -- "from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures." Thus, then, attention is divinely called here to "my doctrine." Let us inquire what this expression means. In Col. 1 we find it set forward in full under the second ministry of this same apostle. "For his body's sake, which is the church, whereof I am made a minister" (Col. 1:24, 25). "My doctrine," then, is evidently that peculiar heavenly economy committed to Paul, of which, too, he himself, in the terms of his mission after his conversion, is the witness, for it was said to him: "Delivering thee," that is, *taking thee out* "from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee" (Acts 26:17). Now here was a distinct heavenly mission, which had no connection whatever with either *man* or *nation*, and so is it as to the church of which he was the minister.

Further, we learn from his Epistle to the Colossians that the knowledge of what he there calls "the mystery of God," was the great preservative against the peculiar wile of Satan to which they were exposed; the wile assumed a double form, namely, Philosophy and Judaism; philosophy being the rationalistic, as Judaism was the religious aspect of the snare. At the present time, all that the Down-grade controversy has brought to light is comprehended under the title of philosophy, this is now as then the great bane of Christianity, and this so-called new theology has not a shred in its garment other than that "vain deceit," which only spoils after "the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

It is of the utmost moment that this "vain deceit" of man's mind be refused and resisted at all cost; the man of God is exhorted to "shun profane and vain babblings."

Moreover, he is to purge himself from men that concerning the truth err, from all such he is to "withdraw himself," "purge himself," "turn away." Again I say, all who love the truth cannot be too thankful to the Lord for the fresh evidence and testimony He Himself has given to the vital importance of separation from evil. But it is well to press the *positive side* of what the present prospect brings before us; it is in the knowledge of the mystery of God, preservation from the *mental* and *religious* snare of the moment, lies; the gospel without the church has been the cause of more evils than one, in these last days. What I mean by the gospel without the church, is a kind of *salvationism*, which makes man's blessing and happiness everything, but leaves out the purposes and counsels of God respecting Christ and His glory. In proof of the supreme importance of the truth at this present juncture, I would point to the agony, the conflict of the apostle, as made known in Col. 2: "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love and unto all riches of the *full assurance of understanding* to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God."

I would point to his agony as expressed in Col. 1, which was according to God's energy in His servant in power, and for what? Even that he might present every man perfect (full grown) in Christ Jesus. But there was even more than this, for assuredly we may read in all His servant's conflicts and labors, the thoughts of his Lord and Master, as to how indispensable in His mind is the knowledge of the mystery of God, for the saints; yet, alas! how little a place it has in our hearts.

May the Lord, in His rich grace, turn the present crisis into an occasion of his own, to set forth more distinctly the great truth concerning "the mystery of God," in which are hid all the "treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Promise Substantiated and God Revealed in Grace (Luke 4:14-32)

We have had before us, in Matt. 2, the first advent of our blessed Lord; and how all men, all classes of people, stood tested by it, and in relation to Him. In the scripture above, the Holy Ghost brings before us the two great consequent effects of His presence on earth, namely, the Christ in His own blessed Person, *substantiating promise*, and God in Him, here on earth, manifested and revealed in all His grace. On these two themes let us dwell for a little.

First, then, as to how all promise met and was fulfilled in Christ; it is blessed to see that He presents Himself in their synagogue at Nazareth as the very One in whom the words of Isa. 61 were fulfilled:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captive, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

How blessed! He stood before them there as Jehovah's anointed Preacher, as Jehovah's sent Healer of broken hearts, He presents Himself before their very eyes as the fulfilment in this of their own prophet; the omission, too, of the last clause of v. 2 of this prophecy makes the grace presented in Himself all the more striking, for surely the day of vengeance *will* come; but it was not *then*. He who came as Savior *will come again* as Judge, but that time has not as yet run round; but *now*, as when He was on earth, it was saving grace and goodness which was reflected in Him in all His ways and dealings with men. How little we think of the exact character of this world in His eye when He was in it. What did He find in the favored land -- Jehovah's land? He found death, devils, disease, sorrow, misery, and wretchedness on every hand. He did not, blessed be His name, stand at a distance, but entered into all the wretchedness and sorrow as none else but Himself could do, measured it all and gauged it all, as only He could. How we are made to feel that we live too far away from human wretchedness to know it in all its reality, but how blessed to know there was One who in grace came into the midst of it, walked through it, as another has most blessedly expressed it: "bringing every grace in God down into man, and taking every sorrow in man up into God."

Now all God's previous dealings with men, kept man at a distance in his sins, and shut God in, holy and righteous, into Himself; darkness and distance describe this period of dealing and testing -- claims unmet and demands not discharged were the sad features of that dispensation. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth subsists through Jesus Christ" -- that is, "That which not having actually been in being before [that is, in the world] now begins to be so," [ἐγένετο]. How blessed is all this to dwell upon, what moral glories surround His path on earth in every part of it, as another has sung:

"We love Thy footprints here to trace,
The moral beauty and the grace
Of all thy walk of love:
Dear memories! -- but would we detain
Thee here below for any gain
Thy company would prove?"

We have, then, in this precious scripture, how promise was fulfilled in His Person -- it was so in *fact*, and He Himself announces it: "This day is this scripture *fulfilled* in your ears." But there is a testimony even from them, for they wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. Blessed for ever be his name! there was no cause for surprise or wonder in that. Alas! we often may well be surprised at the ungracious words and works which so often characterize us; but He was the living contrast to us in everything, in Him the perfection of manhood was found, and found, too, in perfection, as another has so blessedly expressed it:

The hand that struck the chord found all in tune: all answered to the mind of Him whose thoughts of grace and holiness, of goodness, yet of judgment of evil, whose fulness of blessing in goodness were sounds of sweetness to every wearied ear, and found in Christ their only expression, every element, every faculty in His humanity,

responded to the impulse which the divine will gave to it, and then ceased in a tranquillity in which self had no place.

But observe, further, how that it was in His *Person* promise was fulfilled, and there is in this fact a charm of especial sweetness to the heart, it was not the *quality* of grace that shone on one and another here on earth in their wretchedness and misery, but here He Himself, in Person, was found -- the mighty God who became Man, so that He and He alone could say, in reply to the question "Who art thou?" Absolutely what I say unto you -- He *was* what He said. Oh the moral beauty and glory of such an utterance as that! But now mark how all this is met. The announcement that promise was fulfilled in His Person, calls forth the contemptuous utterance: "Is not this Joseph's son?" Their hearts were veiled so as to be unable to see who was there, garbed as He was, in lowly mien; His lowliness offended their pride, and they refused Him; but can grace be turned aside by all the folly and evil of man? Never! it has its purposes which it accomplishes in His time, and to this the blessed Lord gives utterance in these words that follow, namely,

Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.

That is, reject grace and Christ as you may, He will still have objects of divine favor; yet this awakes, if possible, deeper animosity, and as at first they hated and rejected Him, so here they are ready to resort to *violence* and force, to thrust the blessed One out of the city, and even led Him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong.

Oh what a picture of man, of humanity, we have here! how exposed and by Himself, too, who was God revealed in flesh! and this as law never could expose; it did condemn for what was there found as meriting condemnation, it dealt in all its severity with the "what hast thou done" of man; but He who came as Savior, and to accomplish salvation, tested the roots of man's moral status, and brought to light, as He alone could, the "where art thou" of man. Oh how blessed to see Him, wherever we see Him, exposing by His perfectness that which He was about to end on the cross in His own precious death!

But we must turn now to ch. 5, and dwell for a little on the second point, which I have spoken of already and which is there found. In this chapter, then, we find the revelation of Jehovah in a Man, as in ch. 4 we have seen how that promise was fulfilled in Him. It is the great subject throughout the chapter, though set forth in various ways. The first great instance of this is in verses 1-11: it is Jehovah revealed in this blessed Man to Peter's *conscience*; the circumstances all lend their weight to the fact. Peter had been called ere this, he had companied with the Lord and seen His ways, yet, as to Peter's conscience, he had never been face to face, so to speak, with God; but now the moment for it has arrived, and

Peter, in the most favorable circumstances that man could find himself surrounded by, privileged to place his boat at the service of the Lord of glory -- makes a never-to-be-forgotten discovery. The blessed One, having taught the people out of the ship, directs Peter to launch out into the deep, and let down the nets for a draught. Peter does so, evidently doubting the use of further toil after a night of fruitless labor (v. 5). This done, the nets inclosed the treasures of the deep; He who *created* them, *controlled* them and *commanded* them according to His sovereign pleasure; so great was the take that the net brake, the filled ships began to sink, the power and presence of Jehovah in a Man were there, and Peter's conscience breaks down in His presence with "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." What a moment of light it was! It is written, "God is light" -- here is the great proof of it in the conscience of Peter.

The Lord has His own way of conducting us all into this solitude; in that light we see light, as Peter did, he found out that he was "a *sinful man*" -- roots and springs and sources of moral darkness all were there uncovered. And so it is with us, it is in the presence of God alone we learn what we are, and knowledge of self is not reached save there. The revelation of God to us can alone give the sense that we are unfit for His presence. This has ever been the case. (See Isa. 6; Dan. 10:8.)

But observe further here, it was not simply Jehovah revealed to Peter's conscience, *but in grace*, and hence the blessed words "Fear not." In very truth, the One who awakened the conscience can alone meet its thus disclosed needs. It is from Himself who created the earthquake in the conscience, that the sounds of mercy come. The prison at Philippi, later on when, redemption being completed, Christ was on high in the glory of God, affords the same instruction. There the physical earthquake which shook the foundations of the dungeon was His power in nature, as the moral earthquake which shook the jailer (who was in reality the prisoner) was His power in conscience yet in grace! How blessed! and His voice of mercy through His own servants, afflicted and bruised and beaten as they were, was as distinctly His acting in grace as here -- "Do thyself no harm for we are all here"; and "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Blessed words! The first to express the divine compassion that never overlooks human misery, the second to proclaim that grace which is rich and full and free.

Ere we pass from this blessed picture, just observe the effect as here presented to us in v. 11: "And when, they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him." He had captivated their hearts for Himself. He had so fully filled their souls that all on earth was left behind for Him -- true, they did not know Him beyond earth for the moment, and hence after His death, when as they thought all was gone for them, when their *sight* could no longer behold Him, they returned to their fishing. (See John 21:3.) Yet that does not alter the fact now stated, that at this time as far as it went, all is forsaken for Himself. Is it any different thing, now? What can take the heart out of present things but a glorified Christ! Who could say, "I count all things but loss," but he in whose

heart the Savior in glory had been revealed? How blessed when a double discovery is thus made: the vileness of oneself from which it is a relief to retire, and the perfectness of Jesus who becomes the soul's eternal portion and stay.

In the next instance, recorded in verses 12-15, we have Jehovah revealed in His cleansing power. How blessed to see in every case that *He is*, as well as that *He reveals*, Jehovah. The healing of a leper was Jehovah's work alone. But mark this, whilst His power was recognized, His goodness or willingness to help was not assured to the diseased. Now see v. 12, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." The way the Lord meets this is so precious, He not only says He is willing, but touches Him -- it will be borne in mind that to touch a leper made him who so acted unclean in the midst of Israel, and, as such, outside the camp was his place. But observe the contrast here: before their eyes was One who, though Man, was a divine Person, One who could touch a leper and not be defiled, One who had come in all His grace to remove that very defilement, One in whom was all the willingness of mercy and goodness, and One who had all power as God. Well may we sing,

"Whose love is as great as His power,
And knows neither measure nor end."

How blessed to just sit down and dwell in adoring delight on all the perfections and glories of Christ, to find our food and freshness in thus, by faith, taking Him into our souls, the very bread of God that cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world.

There is one other point here of exceeding beauty and blessedness, on which it is a delight to dwell. Observe v. 16, how fully and perfectly He maintains His place of entire and perfect dependence as Man before God, and that, too, in the hour of His fame and greatness among men. Oh how precious that verse: "He withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed" -- that is, He was at that time waiting, occupied with prayer; what a sight for angels and for men! let the power exercised be ever so great, and manifestly the power of God -- divine power -- still He is, as ever, the dependent Man. How blessed!

I will, before bringing these thoughts to a close, here transcribe a few words of another, which are both food and solace to the heart in these weary days, and amid the heat and strife of the desert scene, now so near its end, and suggested by these scenes and events on which our hearts have been dwelling --

If I open the Old Testament anywhere, the Gospels, the Epistles, what different atmosphere I find myself in at once. In the Old: ways, dealings, government, man -- though man and the world governed by God no doubt, but piety in that scene; and even in the Gospels and Epistles the difference is quite as great -- in certain respects more important. In the Epistles (so the Acts) one active to gather -- souls devoted to Christ, valuing Him and His work above all -- power shown more than in Christ on earth, as He promised -- it is gathering, then caring power. I get back, though now in the power of the Holy Ghost, and grace in a saving, gathering way, to man, and it soon fails. But in the Gospels I find a center where my mind reposes,