

# Christ

OUR DEVOTIONAL  
EXAMPLE

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ZUCK



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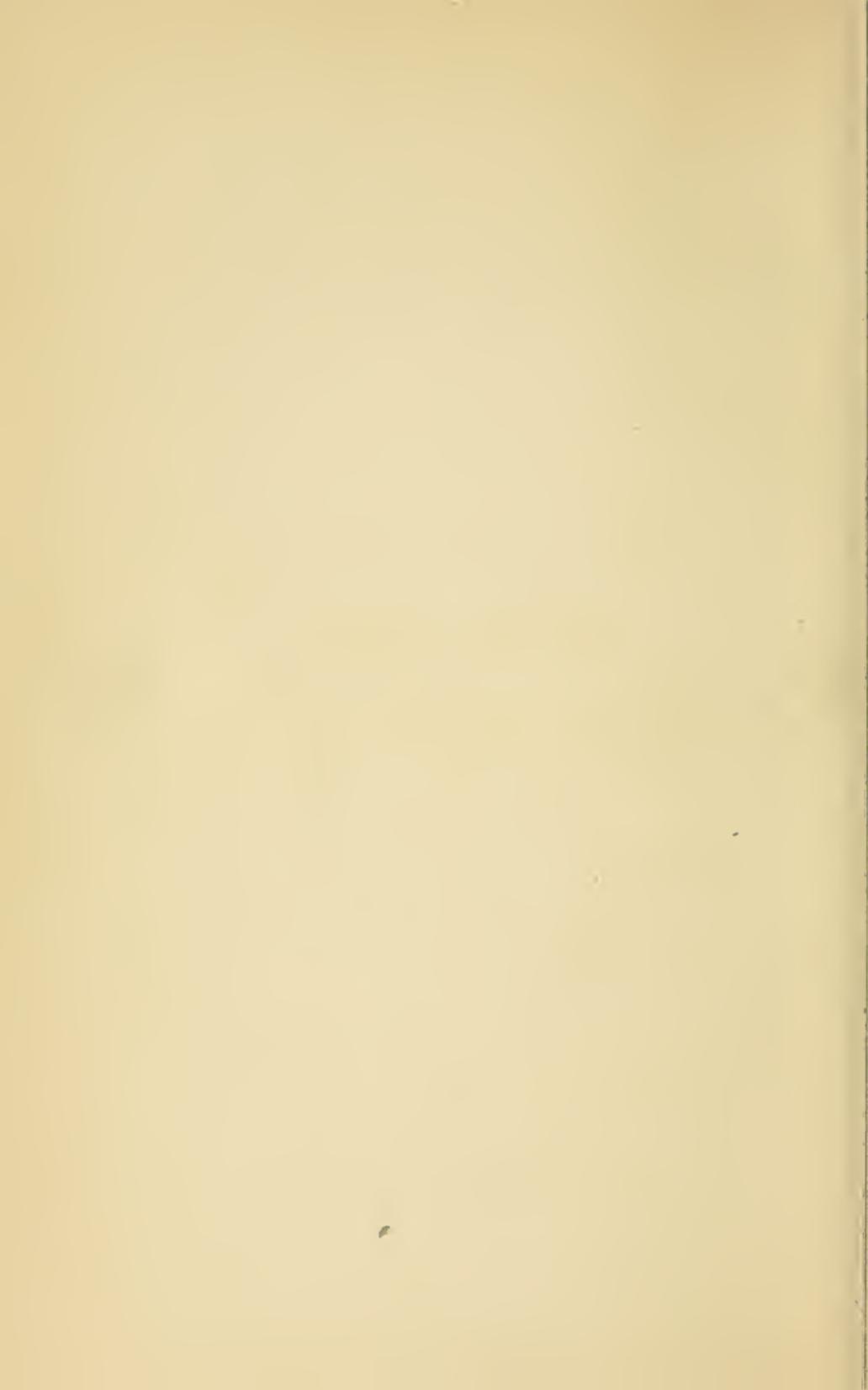


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# Christ Our Devotional Example

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BY

WILLIAM JOHNSTON ZUCK, A.M., D.D.



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To My Wife



## Foreword

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THE devotional life is defined in Scripture phrase as one in which the mind is set "on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth." It is a "life hid with Christ in God." We are in the world, but we are not to be of the world.

Many Christians have found to their great delight that this high ideal is possible and worthy of attainment. Our religion is not a creed, not a mere profession, not a garment that may be taken off and put on at pleasure. It is a life; life implies development; and the higher the form of life, the greater is the need of care and cultivation. We shall never know the best of our religious experience until we have learned to grow each day in sweet and tender fellowship with Jesus Christ.

We are sometimes told that the Christian life does not always appear to be a happy one. The reason is

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mainly this: We give so little time to "the things that are above." The measure of our joy and power is the constancy and intensity of our devotion. We must make real to ourselves the truth that it is "in Him we live, and move, and have our being."

The following pages are studies in the devotional life of Christ. They are by no means exhaustive. Much more could have been written upon each, and upon other phases of that matchless life of service and devotion. May every reader of this little book consciously find growing within him the desire to be more like Him who said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

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## Introductory

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*Man shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that proceedeth out  
of the mouth of God.*

WHERE shall we find a perfect life whereby  
To shape our lives for all eternity?

This man is great and wise; the world reveres him;  
Reveres, but cannot love his heart of stone;  
And so it dares not follow, though it fears him,  
But bids him walk his mountain path alone.

That man is good and gentle; all men love him,  
Yet dare not ask his feeble arm for aid;  
The world's best work is ever far above him;  
He shrinks beneath the storm-capped mountain's  
shade.

O loveless strength! O strengthless love! the  
Master,  
Whose life shall shape our lives, is not as thou;  
Sweet Friend in peace, strong Savior in disaster,  
Our heart of hearts infolds Thine image now!

Be Christ's the fair and perfect life, whereby  
We shape our lives for all eternity.

—*Charles F. Richardson.*

## The Words of God

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### I

## The Words of God

JESUS taught that we have souls to be fed, as well as bodies. Our life does not depend on bread alone, but on the sovereign will and good pleasure of God. At the very threshold of His career, Jesus acknowledged that trust in God's words is the source of life and power. To repel doubt and conquer the enemy, He relied upon God's words, and so must we.

If we wish to understand and appreciate the devotional element in the life of Jesus, the best and purest man that ever lived, it will be necessary to study briefly the history of His people, their religious instincts and spirits, as well as the conditions of His own time and nature. This will naturally lead us into the pages of the Old Testament, Christ's one text-book of devotion.

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With it He was thoroughly familiar and in perfect sympathy, and it probably did more than we can ever tell to mold His thought and shape His plans.

Any history of the Hebrew people, or of any great man of that people, must lay much emphasis on the element of devotion. The quiet, meditative religious life finds its highest type and product in the race chosen by God from all the nations to be His own choice possession. Other elements they had in common with the most cultivated and aggressive races in ancient times, but the religious element was their distinctive inheritance and crown of glory. It is, perhaps, true that these people were, in many instances, more religious than moral, as judged by modern standards; but we must remember that their ideas and conduct were the product not so much of training and education as of impulse. Their literature is distinguished from all others by its religious fervor and enthusiasm.

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In the patriarchal age, religious life was characterized by depth and simplicity. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were children in their knowledge and practice of ethics; but in their sense of God and His presence with them, in His concern in all the affairs of their lives, molding and determining them, these men were profound, and put us moderns to shame. He walked with them, spoke to them, and at all times was their abiding Friend. The strength and depth of their character grew out of the fact that their lives were rooted in God, and by meditation and face-to-face converse with Him, their deepest yearnings and longings were fully satisfied.

We have moved far away from the simple trust and familiarity of the patriarchs. To-day we talk about God as "law" and "principle" and "idea" and "doctrine," and very little of Him as Friend and Counsellor. If we know more of systems of ethics and morals, we know less of religion in this deepest

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sense of His abiding presence in all the shifting scenes of life. To see and know God as a personal Friend is far more than to know Him as First Cause or Ultimate Reason.

This close and familiar intercourse with God was followed by a period quite different in its devotional elements. The simplicity and directness of the patriarchal age gave way to the complex and regal splendor of national organization. The altar was now merged in the tabernacle, and later still the latter in the temple. God's presence was now manifested in thundering Sinai, in fiery and cloudy pillar, in bleeding victim, in burning incense. For many long years the process of religious training went on, sometimes slowly and sometimes rapidly, but never entirely lost from the consciousness of the individual or of the nation. Purity of heart and a clean life are the deepest lessons of Leviticus, and must have been the longing of earnest devotion. It would be impossible not

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to see the spiritual significance of tabernacle and temple, with their elaborate service, and not be touched with these object-lessons in which so much was revealed of the character of God and the destiny of man.

But the religious life of the Old Testament is richest in the Psalms, and the so-called Wisdom Books,—Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. All of these are in poetic form, and to be appreciated must be read as poetry. Some attention, too, must be given to the literary structure, for the most deeply spiritual trains of thought are often reflected in parallelism of clauses, or in the literary effects of climax or surprise. Students of literature know that poetry is the language of the emotions, and because religion lays hold of the deepest emotions of the human soul, and is made to vibrate under its impulses as the pendulum swings to and fro, it is not difficult to understand why the truest and deepest devotion expresses itself in song. The poetry of

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the Bible in this respect far surpasses the noblest products of the most cultivated Indo-Germanic races, the Greek, the Roman, and the Hindu. No one will dispute the statement, "No poetry has such power over the souls of men as Hebrew poetry." The subjective element, the vibrating chords of the poet's own emotions, the varied phases of his own experience, are all given in such fullness of utterance in the Psalter, Proverbs, and Book of Job, that these books will constitute the world's library of devotion for all time. They are world-wide in their sway, and everlasting in their sweep.

These lyric poems express every phase of religious feeling. They abound in adoration and praise, humiliation and confession. The poet sings of joy and sorrow, faith and hope, love and hate; the conflicts of life, with its agony and despair, and not less, indeed, its ecstasy and exaltation, are given as the common experience of humanity. The Book of Proverbs gives

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expression to the thought, which is itself a result of meditation and reflection on the great problem of life, that righteousness and prosperity in this life go hand-in-hand; the good man is favored by God, and the wicked man suffers. The Book of Job presents an apparent exception in the story of a man who has always been good and upright, so acknowledged in the councils of heaven, and yet is made to suffer on an ash-heap the pangs of physical pain and the scorn of friends. The problem of suffering receives ample treatment and solution, but of deeper interest is the crisis of the soul in its longing after God, and its final and complete rest in Him. Ecclesiastes is another apparent exception to the truth of Proverbs,—a man prosperous in all that the world calls success and happiness, but what the wise man pronounces “vanity of vanities.”

Another phase of the devotional element in the Old Testament is seen in the life and work of the prophets.

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These men were seers, religious idealists, and whether they spoke to the individual or to the nation, it was always with a "thus saith the Lord." The prophets were the teachers and preachers of their times, and they distinctly claim that it is the word of God which they speak. There were many ways in which He spoke to them and revealed His will. In the purest stage of prophecy, the best idea of the prophets' relation to God is seen in their earnest devotion and rapt spiritual communion with Him. They interceded with God, and many times the communication of a revelation to them is called an "answer,"—the same expression that is used in regard to prayer. Their fellowship with Him was intimate; His Spirit was upon them, giving them discernment, counsel, and authority. They were powerful, because personal piety, such as belonged to them, was a great creative force; the sense of their near relation to God made them strong and influ-

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ential in matters political as well as religious.

The devotional spirit has thus found its outward expression in these many ways, marked, of course, by differences depending on the great religious movements of the age, and yet alike in all essential respects, because man's need of God has never changed. The world has been longing for God, and God has been pleased to reveal Himself in many ways. He has always spoken to man, and there have always been many devout hearts to hear His words. Graciously have they fallen upon our ears and comforted our hearts. But the best word, the most glorious message He has ever sent to this poor world, is that expressed in Jesus Christ. To Him we are to look for the truest example of the devotional life, and in Him, as we shall study His life and words, we shall hope to find our highest and purest ideal of the religious spirit.



*I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.*

CHILDREN of yesterday,  
Heirs of to-morrow,  
What are you weaving,  
Labor and sorrow?  
Look to your looms again!  
Faster and faster  
Fly the great shuttles  
Prepared by the Master;  
Life's in the loom;  
Room for it—room.

—*Unknown.*

## Till All be Fulfilled

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### II

## Till All be Fulfilled

IT is easy to exaggerate the difference between the Old Testament and the New. Indeed, it would be better not to speak of their difference, except that which is always implied in any process of evolution. Jesus puts them in their proper relation, and gives to each its proper setting. He accepted the Old without any reservation: "Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." The difference, therefore, is not the result of a revolutionary movement. The Old was to pass away, not by destruction, but by fulfillment; the bud is fulfilled in the rose.

It was true with Christ, as it is true with us, that He was the product of the past. The far-off gaze of patriarch and

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prophet was the earnest of satisfied longings and fulfilled desires that already linked their present with the future. "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad"; and good old Simeon felt the same thrill of gladness, when he said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." What a disappointment it would have been, had Jesus announced at the inauguration of His kingdom an entirely new constitution and program. But that is never the divine principle of action. God has always recognized some good in the existing order of things, and His method has been that of education or evolution. In this sense, Jesus was the fulfillment of the past.

Christ did not, then, break faith with the past, simply because it was the past. He had not only respect for it, but even veneration, and insists that His followers shall have the same. For those who

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kept insisting that righteousness must conform even to the minutest details of law, including its traditions, He had words of censure. He would have "the whole body full of light," not simply "the tips of the fingers." It was said, indeed, that He was setting aside the old customs and beliefs, and was thus destroying their force; but in reality He accepted the old covenant more cordially and thoroughly than did those whom He censured. The kingdom of God as introduced by Christ was built upon foundations that had long been laid.

Humanly speaking, Jesus could not have done without the long and eventful history of His people. That history, with its varying scenes of spiritual advance and decline, its great problems and its great men, was not only familiar to Him, but was a part of Him. He lived upon its prophecies, was inspired by its hopes, and used to the fullest extent its materials. It prompted much of His thinking, ap-

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pealed to His imagination, and dominated His meditations. With the trials and temptations that came to Him as "He went on His way," the Old Testament furnished the discipline that made Him perfect. He could not and did not break with the old.

More, indeed, than we think, does the past have to do with our spiritual longings. No man can escape it, and he should have no desire to do so. It may be a help or a hindrance, as one pleases to make it. What we are, we owe to it and to those who have lived and wrought so well. The man who thinks little of the past, and who fails to appreciate its worth to him, is little more than a savage. Our lives are enriched by the labor and sacrifice, by the hopes and fears, by the joys and sorrows of the men and women who have lived and died. "They rest from their labors, but their works do follow them."

Much of our peace and happiness will depend on right adjustments with

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the past and present. One of the most beautiful things in life is to grow old and keep sweet,—sweet with the ever-changing world, sweet with the new and untried notions of many, many minds. How hard it is for some to be reconciled to the new order of things! The good old days seem to many to be passing away, and with them, to some at least, the most blessed experiences of life. But why should we thus rob ourselves of the joy of fulfilled desires? God does not wish our present to be marred by gloomy and distrustful views of the past. He would rather have us remember that

. . . . . "through the ages one increasing purpose runs,  
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns."

Jesus came not to destroy, but to fulfill, and we must take Him at His word. His life and work were thus a part of a whole, one feature of a great plan, reaching backward as well as forward. And God's plan for this

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world includes your life and mine. There is some place in which He wishes us to work, some task for the doing of which we shall be held responsible. We are appointed, it may be, to complete another's work, to fulfill the earlier prophecy of some one unknown to any but God Himself. But, like Christ, our work in the world, in its relation to the past, will be rather constructive than destructive. Is it too much to say that, in the quiet hours of His meditation, the great problems of His life, as it looked toward the past and the future, pressed in upon Him? Was His attitude toward the future more perplexing than that towards the past? Certainly not, if we may judge from the importance he attached to the laying of foundations. He was the Master-Builder, because the superstructure must have no foundations of hay and stubble; and the foundation upon which He built was the eternal purpose of God as revealed in the succession of the ages.

## Till All be Fulfilled

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There is precious comfort in the thought that after while all shall be fulfilled. "For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully, even as also I was fully known." The time is coming when there will be no past, no present, no future, to engage our thought and serious concern; in the presence of Him who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever," and with whom "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," we shall be beyond the reach of change, and in possession of complete and perfect knowledge. Let us patiently await His time who said, "Till all be fulfilled."



*Enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray.*

HAVE you and I to-day  
Stood silent as with Christ, apart from joy, or fray  
Of life, to see His face;  
To look, if but a moment, in its grace,  
And grow, by brief companionship, more true  
More nerved to lead, to dare, to do  
For Him at any cost? Have we to-day  
Found time, in thought, our hand to lay  
In His, and thus compare  
His will with ours, and wear  
The impress of His wish? Be sure  
Such contact will endure  
Throughout the day; will help us walk erect  
Through storm and flood; detect  
Within the hidden life sin's dross, its stain;  
Revive a thought of love for Him again;  
Steady the steps which waver; help us see  
The footpath meant for you, and me.

—*Unknown.*

## The Secret Place

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### III

## The Secret Place

CHRIST emphasized in His teaching and by His example the private life of devotion much more than the public life of worship. Both are of great value to spiritual growth and enjoyment, and will need cultivation for the highest results.

The inner chamber is but one form of private devotion, and the Savior must have found it helpful in His own experience, or he would not have commended it so urgently upon His disciples. No rule of conduct and no principle of the deepest spirituality was urged by Him upon others which He had not first tried. His need was as great as ours, and with more earnestness and sincerity than we can ever command He searched for the best and surest paths of progress. When

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He tells us, therefore, to close all the doors that open to the world around us, and to sit down in a face-to-face interview with the Father, we shall expect it to be in some way a source of delight and strength.

One thing is very sure to happen when we have closed the door and are alone with God—we shall at least be honest with ourselves. It is not easy to be strictly honest in the presence of the great crowd; we are not our real and truest selves when we know that the world is watching us, and drawing its conclusions from the premises of our actions and words. Indeed there are not many of us who are willing to reveal our real selves to our nearest and dearest friends. There is within each one of us a holy of holies, into which we allow no one to enter but the high priest of our own personality. Much as we love our dearest earthly friends, we are loth to tell them all our thoughts and temptations and aspirations; and yet to the extent that we

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have learned to do this with our dearest friend, whom we can take with us behind the closed door, and to whom we are willing to disclose our most secret selves, have we found the highest communion possible, except that with the Father himself. With Him there is nothing to be gained by our withholding anything, for He knows it already; and when we recognize this great truth, and know that He is our sympathizing and truest Friend, the door of the secret chamber will close many times, and shut the world outside. The revelation of ourselves to ourselves in the presence of Him who knows us altogether, will be neither distracting nor disheartening.

The inner chamber will also be a means of strength. Every soul has its own struggles, and, in a sense, must fight them alone; not alone, indeed, if he has found this secret place of spiritual power and grace. We are not stronger in the front of battle than is our strength in the quiet and still

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hours of meditation. It has been said that every life that would be mighty must know what it is to muse. This is the necessary preparation for active service. Silence and solitude will dispel our vanity of spirit, and show us the weak places in our spiritual armor, better than the fiery darts of the enemy in life's actual conflicts. He has not learned to fight well in the open who has not first been trained in secret in all the habiliments and maneuvers of war. "In thy chamber thou shalt find what abroad thou shalt too often lose."

If Jesus so often avoided the multitude, and taught His disciples so to do, shall we not likewise accustom ourselves in our deepest longings to be alone? Life has many calls and makes many demands, but none is more imperative than some time every day to shut the door. The busiest man or woman will find more time, rather than less, of advantage and enjoyment. The greatest wrong Christians are bringing upon themselves to-day is that they

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never shut the door upon the world. We have no time for anything but our business; the gross things of life consume our energies and leave only the blackened ruins of unsatisfied spiritual cravings. Better, far better, less of the world, and more of God. Yes, we must see Him alone and tell Him of our failures, our desires, our successes; and when, from behind the door which has shut out the tumults of the world and its incessant and disheartening strife, we hear His voice in tones of command, correction, or approval, the path outside will be the easier and the smoother. Another has said, "Stay with Him in thy closet; for thou shalt not find so great peace anywhere else."

As I write these lines, it comes to me with a power I have never felt before how easy it is for us to sit behind the shut door with an absent friend. The one I love best is many miles away, and yet she has been constantly in my thought, early and late, in the busiest hours of the day and in the silent

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watches of the night. Scarcely a task has been commenced or finished that she has not known all about, if thought can bridge the rivers and climb the mountains. I have seen her go about her daily work, have heard her voice in song, have pictured the family group in the distant home; and these thoughts of her have been my joy and strength.

Something like this is what Jesus means when He asks us to shut the door and talk with Him. Is it not just as easy to think of Him, and to recall His words and deeds of love among men? May we not have as clear a picture of our Christ hanging on the walls of our memory as we have of our dearest earthly friend? Yes, we have seen Him, and talked with Him. The inner chamber, the closed door, are blessed realities.

*Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place,  
and rest a while.*

OUT of the earthly good which Thou hast given,  
The beauty and the blessedness which be,  
How shall I gather up and take to heaven  
Thine own, with usury?

How shall I give Thee back the morning splendor,  
Purple of folding mists, and sunset glow?  
What answer at Thy judgment shall I render  
For Thy white fields of snow?

What reckoning wilt Thou ask me for the roses,  
The lilies of the field, and goldenrod?  
The treasure of Thy woods when spring uncloses  
How shall I give Thee, God?

Set Thou Thy hand upon my spirit, sealing  
Thy parables of sun and flower and frost,  
That in Thy day of reckoning and revealing  
Not one of them be lost.

Wrought in my heart by holy transmutation,  
Bloomed in my soul for other souls to see,  
Let me give back the beauty of creation—  
Thine own, with usury.

—*Mabel Earle.*

## With Nature

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### IV

## With Nature

WEARY and worn with labor, and sad in heart because of the word that His disciples had brought Him concerning the cruel blow that had fallen upon John, Christ crossed the sea to be in a desert place apart. The death of the forerunner was a crisis in the life of our Lord, for its meaning was felt much more by Him than by any or all of the disciples. The great preacher of righteousness had met a most tragic end, and the Christ was now left alone to carry on the work which John had so auspiciously begun.

But why does Jesus go to the desert? It was not a desolate, barren waste where He sought refuge. The "wilder-ness" of the temptation, and the "desert place apart" were lonely, uninhabited regions, remote from the dwellings of

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men and the highways of commerce. We know this to be true, for in this desert place He commanded the hungry multitudes that followed Him from the towns and cities to sit down on the grass before He fed them. In the shadow of His great bereavement, and in the still deeper shadow of His own death throwing itself across His pathway, He must be alone with nature and with nature's God; and yet not entirely alone, for the little boat carried with Him across the sea to the quiet retreat the little band of returned missionaries.

In all of this we see another form or phase of Christ's religious life. His sympathy with nature was keen and abundant. Think of the many illustrations drawn from nature and used so freely in all His talks with the people. The heavens, the earth, the sea, and even their depths, did not escape His thoughtful and reverent study. The birds, the flowers, the grass, the fish, the rocks, the mountains, all

## With Nature

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appeal to that love which draws us in tenderness to the great heart of nature. His spiritual life responded in no little measure to the beauty and power of the natural world.

And it should be so with us. Our too strenuous and grasping life makes us forget our mother earth. Wordsworth has sweetly said :

“The world is too much with us ; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers ;  
Little we see in nature that is ours ;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon !  
This sea that bares her bosom to the moon ;  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune,  
It moves us not.”

Long ago, the Hebrew poet sang :

“The heavens declare the glory of God ;  
And the firmament showeth his handiwork.”

In beautiful phrase of poetic prose, the old prophet Isaiah declares :

“The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

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And so we do not wonder that Jesus Himself, who was the greatest of all poets and seers, found refreshment in the thought that God fed the birds and clothed the grass of the field with beauty.

Oh, how much of quiet but deep and abiding joy we lose when we have lost our love for nature. There is no memory of childhood days that clings more tenaciously to our advancing years than the walks and rambles along the streams and in the woods. But we may, if we will, carry with us into middle life and old age these precious communings with nature. We wrong ourselves if we do not read God's message in the physical world about us. Surely He does not mean that we should think of it only as the gross material upon which we are to concentrate our activities for base and ignoble ends. There is something in common between nature and man, and what can it be except that they are made each for the other by one common hand?

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There are some who would have us believe that God has abandoned the world, as a man would forsake a worn-out machine. It cannot be. He is not far away from a world so beautiful as ours. In the morning of its creation, He said it was very good, and it has lost none of the features it then had. Nature is still the expression of His will and character, and to the meditative soul it has a tender voice. Even in its rougher moods, in the howling of the tempest and the flashing of the lightnings, there is food for hungry souls.

What may we not find in the devout contemplation of nature! How many lessons we may learn to guide the paths we make through life! For nature is a great teacher, and we do well to stop our mad rush for gain and glory to put ourselves under so wise tuition. Nowhere can we better learn that God's ways are better than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts. To chasten and soften the spirit that is

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made hard by contact with the unsympathetic world of mankind, to purify and ennoble the emotions and affections which become dull, if not indeed quite dead, by the routine of life's cares, there is no book more easily accessible and powerful than that which is spread out before us in landscape and sky.

He, indeed, is happy who can follow his Master into the desert place apart. When Christ was about to have some new and strange experience, it was His custom, as one has said, "to step back a pace or two, like some runner about to take a leap." So it was with Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist. So it has been with the heroes of our religion in all ages. If we would be like Him, we shall find strength and comfort in the fields and woods, by the streams and lakes, among the trees and flowers.

"On that day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside." Can we not see Him there, pondering deeply the future of His work? Read what

## With Nature

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follows that first verse of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. After the crowd had broken into the Savior's quiet retreat, from a little boat on the placid and glimmering sea He spoke that marvelous series of parables which set forth, not only the nature of the obstacles to the kingdom He had come on earth to establish, but also its certain growth and final consummation.

Blessed sea was that to have so much of the Master's presence! He must have found along its shores that which calmed His spirit and made Him hopeful.

"And when I read the thrilling love  
Of Him who walked upon the sea,  
I long, oh, how I long once more  
To follow Him in Galilee.

"O Galilee, sweet Galilee,  
Where Jesus loved so much to be;  
O Galilee, blue Galilee,  
Come sing thy song again to me."



*Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that  
in them ye have eternal life; and these are they  
which bear witness of me.*

THERE'S One whose life I love to read,  
Such truth was His, such gracious deed!  
It met the common people's need;  
    Where'er He was, a crowd would be,  
    On Jordan's banks, beside the sea,  
    Or in the ways of Galilee.  
The words He spake, the works He did,  
Were LIGHT, and "He could not be hid."

Sometimes I fancy I'm among  
That eager Galilean throng  
Who followed Jesus all day long;  
    They followed Him His gifts to share;  
    The sinful, sick, and poor were there,  
    Charmed by His wisdom, love, and care.  
The words He spake, the works He did,  
Were LIGHT, and "He could not be hid."

He taught what all men want to know  
While they are pilgrims here below,  
Exposed to sickness, sin, and woe;  
    How foul disease may find a cure,  
    How sinful hearts may be made pure,  
    And life, eternal life, made sure.  
The words He spake, the works He did,  
Were LIGHT, and "He could not be hid."

That Life of Light has gone away,  
But He has left His church to stay,  
To shine until the final day;  
    For this dark world a beaming light,  
    Becoming every year more bright,  
    To banish wholly pagan night.  
The church which does as Jesus did  
Is LIGHT, and it cannot be hid.

—William T. Sleeper.

### V

## It is Written

IT is not strange at all that Jesus was familiar with the Old-Testament Scriptures, the Bible of His day. We need not ask by what means, or at what age He learned to read it; the fact that He knew the history of His people, that He quoted so frequently from these sacred books, that much of His style and vocabulary is drawn from Old-Testament writers, is evidence sufficient that it had become a large part of His thought and meditation. The reader of the Gospels in the Revised Version will see at a glance the frequent use Christ made of these old writings.

This is not the place to discuss the relation of the New Testament to the Old, and yet it is worth while, perhaps, to say that Christ's use of the Old has helped vastly to show their unity. Es-

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pecially is this true of the value He placed upon the Scriptures as a means of spiritual culture. He was very clear in His statement that they bore witness of Him, but searching the Scriptures did not always result in finding Him. It seems to be true that even in His day there was some Bible study that was not always profitable, for it missed the mark of revealing Jesus Christ to the hearts of men, and subsequently the result was their refusing to accept Him as their Lord. Plainly did He say to the generation of that time, "For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"

But how did Christ become familiar with the contents and the spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament? Let us grant that He had a spiritual insight it is not possible for sinful beings to have. It may be that having no sin, not because it was impossible for Him to sin, but because He refused

## It is Written

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to yield to sin, Christ found the road to the Father easier than it will be for any of us. We shall not take away from Christ the intellectual supremacy that belongs to Him. But if His endowments were greater, it would not be surprising if His needs and temptations were greater also. Highly organized beings are a hundredfold more sensitive to external and internal influences than the lower and more simple. Even Christ was made perfect through suffering, so that His load was not easy, His burden was not light; He needed strength and comfort as we need them in working out the problems of our life and destiny.

If Jesus was thus human as well as divine, He would follow every road that would fortify and satisfy His nature. This alone explains His wonderful familiarity with and reliance upon Scripture. He hurled against Satan the words that God had written; He confounded the Pharisees again and again by quoting in confirmation of

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His work their own trusted documents. Sometimes He thus strengthened the wavering faith of His disciples, and rebuked the murmurings of His enemies. In the crisis of physical and mental suffering on the cross, there springs to His lips the cry of the psalmist in the dark and lonely hour of anguish. And after His resurrection, the little band that took with Him that afternoon walk to Emmaus did not soon forget the way in which He had opened to them the Scriptures, just as the assembled multitude at Nazareth a few months before wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth. No one there that day knew so well the meaning of that marvelous prophecy of Isaiah concerning Himself.

It is unnecessary to say that the devoutest Christians are diligent students of the Word. No faith can be so strong that it will not need some support, and, indeed, the stronger the faith, the more intrenched it is in the

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great truths of the Scriptures. Communion with God through His Word is not only a duty, a means of grace, but it is a great delight. *The words of Jesus* are meat and drink to those whose souls hunger and thirst for Him. "The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life."

When we come to measure our religious experience, we shall find nothing to occupy so large a place as our knowledge of and appropriation of the Bible. As an interpreter of life, it furnishes a standard for conduct, and constantly reminds us, what we are too prone to forget, that Christ has come into the world to give us not only life, but the abundant life. In the crises and emergencies of life, there is no other source of comfort that brings us peace. Before the light which comes from the Bible, the darkest clouds that can gather above and around us disappear. The Bible finds us in every condition, and finds us in the deepest longings and yearnings of our spiritual needs.

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Have we not found it, indeed, to be the guide of our life in youth, in manhood, in old age?

What we get out of the Bible will depend altogether on the purpose and method of our study. So many Christians have said that it does not interest them; they cannot find its beauties, and even while they read it, their minds are elsewhere. They admit that others can discover glorious truths and helpful lessons, but they cannot. It is true that none of us will find all its beauties and blessings, but it need not be a sealed book to any one who is really anxious to find its hidden treasures. We value and appreciate a book the author of which we know, and in the subject of which we have an interest. May this not suggest the reason why Bible study has not found favor with many? If we do not really know Christ, if we have not made Him the companion of our daily toil and the sharer of all our joys and sorrows, we are not likely to put a very high esti-

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mate upon His words; but to those who have been joined personally to Jesus Christ has come a joy from the reading and study of His Word that they would not exchange for all this world.

The study of the Bible as a means of grace is the highest achievement of all. We must come to it with attention, with prayer, with appreciation, with discriminating judgment, with appropriating faith. Of all these, the most essential, perhaps, is the spirit of prayer, for prayer will bring us through the words of Scripture into the presence of God. Difficulties will then vanish, and doubt will lose its power; the printed page will then be radiant with light, and the heart will find what it most needs. The listening ear will hear the voice of God.

Shall we not as a means of grace, as a source of comfort, as a real delight, meditate more and more upon the blessed truths of the Word of God and incarnate them in our lives! Then shall we become living epistles, little

## Christ Our Devotional Example

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Bibles, known and read of our fellowmen. This very day, this very night, may we open the Book with new purpose of heart to find God.

“How sweet are thy words unto my taste!  
Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

*Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*

BE not afraid to pray,—to pray is right.  
Pray, if thou canst, with hope; but ever pray,  
Though hope be weak, or sick with long delay;  
Pray in the darkness, if there be no light.  
Far is the time remote from human sight  
When war and discord on the earth shall cease;  
Yet every prayer for universal peace  
Avails the blessed time to expedite.  
Whate'er is good to wish, ask that of Heaven,  
Though it be what thou canst not hope to see;  
Pray to be perfect, though material leaven  
Forbid the spirit so on earth to be;  
But if for any wish thou darest not pray,  
Then pray to God to cast that wish away.

—*Hartley Coleridge.*

## Teach Us to Pray

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### VI

## Teach Us to Pray

THE reader of the Gospels has often noticed the emphasis placed upon prayer by Christ in His teaching, and not less the fact that Christ himself was much given to prayer. It seems all the more surprising when we remember that He was sinless, and that at no time did He ever repent for any word or deed. There are many evidences that He felt all the limitations of humanity, and, therefore, the sense of dependence was as keen in Him as it is in us. It was in His prayer-life that this dependence was most manifest, and if Jesus felt the need of prayer to calm and strengthen His spirit, how much more do we need it in the storm and stress of our wayward life!

We find many more references to prayer in private than to prayer in

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public. Some are willing to contend that He never prayed *with* others, but always *before* others, or *for* others, or *alone*. The occasions of His prayers are full of interest. At His baptism (Luke 3:21, 22), before choosing His apostles (Luke 6:12), at and after the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:39-46), at the transfiguration (Luke 9:28, 29), at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35-44), for Peter (Luke 22:32), in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42), on the cross (Mark 15:33-35),—these all indicate a variety of circumstance and need, and show conclusively that prayer was a fixed habit of our Lord.

If we could here study the prayers of Jesus, we would be surprised at their number and the wide range of supplication contained in them. There can be no doubt that they have come down to us much abridged, and yet, somehow, their brevity and conciseness argue their completeness. Repetitions and circumlocutions are not to be found; they are the utterance of a heart that

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feels its own need, and that of others. How much we might learn in this first characteristic of our Lord's recorded prayers! He has also said that we should not use vain repetitions as the heathen do, who think they shall be heard for their much speaking. The sentence-prayer has its place and power in the busy life of the Nazarene. Indeed, so constant and habitual was His communion with the Father that He kept it up in the midst of the multitude, and converted the crowded street into a religious retreat. He found time to talk with God even when most pressed by friend and foe. And so must we, if we would appropriate the most blessed gift and at the same time the most powerful weapon God has given to us.

When we remember that prayer is mighty, almost omnipotent, and that we are commanded to use it, we wonder that it has entered so little into our daily lives. We have not learned the sweetest lesson in the school of our

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religious training, until we find place and time for deep and quiet communion with God.

We have said that Christ was sinless, and, therefore, confession of sin has no place in His prayers. Not so, however, with thanksgiving and petition, as parts or elements of true prayer. The Father's grace and mercy He gratefully acknowledged, sometimes indirectly, but easily felt in the words themselves. He freely asked for the things His heart craved, and when the shadows fell across His path, the openness of His spirit was the best evidence that God was near to sustain and bless. When the doors of our hearts are open, and we sit within with a sense of dependence and expectancy, God is not afar off, nor will He need to be awaked. Even before we call, He enters, a welcomed guest to sit and sup with us.

Sometimes the answer to prayer is the answer of denial, and even Jesus had to take at times such an answer. But let us never forget that, for the

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best reasons, denial is after all a true answer to prayer. If the cup for the passing of which Jesus prayed had not been pressed to His lips, there would have been no atonement for the world's sin. But His prayer subordinated His will to that of the Father's and so was answered, even though the thing prayed for was denied. His supreme joy was the doing of the Father's will, not His own, and in this quiet resignation He has set for us the supreme example of conduct in what many of us have called our unanswered prayers.

The Christian's prayer-life is the truest expression of his deepest yearnings. It is the secret of his power, the measure of his usefulness, the key-note of his joy. The church of the Lord Jesus needs nothing so much as it needs a revival of prayer,—incessant, faithful, hopeful intercession at the throne. In the last analysis the source of the power of the individual Christian and of any spiritual movement is God, and the energies of God are re-

## **Christ Our Devotional Example**

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leased in answer to prayer. Whatever is needed in your life and mine to make them stronger, purer, and more fruitful in the salvation of others, is within our reach, if we use, as Jesus Christ used, so simply, so constantly, so prevailingly, the opportunity of unlocking by prayer the energies of our God.

O Christian, have you prayed to-day? Have you seen the Father's countenance filled with blessed light turned full upon your soul? Have you heard His voice in sweetest accent saying unto you, Be still, my child, I am thy God?

A comparatively young man, who has gone around the world several times in the interests of the Student Volunteer Movement, writes in these words of a part of his journey: "When I went through Palestine I was deeply moved with the reflection, that if the little hill back of Nazareth could disclose its secret; if the Galilean lake could tell what has transpired there; if the desert places round about Jerusa-

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lem could unfold their story; if the olive-trees could reveal what they have witnessed, they would fill in the silent places of the Gospels and would tell us chiefly about the prayer-life of our Lord. They would tell us of the range of his prayer-life, of its unselfishness, of its intensity, of its unceasingness, of its fervor, and of its irresistible power because of the godly fear behind it."

Are we not ready now to resolve in the quiet of this meditation to possess a stronger ambition than ever to be men and women of prayer? Let us follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, our great exemplar. Lord, teach us to pray.



*I have spoken openly to the world; I ever taught  
in synagogues, and in the temple.*

I WAS glad when they said unto me,  
Let us go unto the house of Jehovah.  
Our feet are standing  
Within thy gates, O Jerusalem,  
Jerusalem, that art builded  
As a city that is compact together;  
Whither the tribes go up, even the tribes of Jeho-  
vah,  
For an ordinance for Israel,  
To give thanks unto the name of Jehovah.  
For there are set thrones for judgment,  
The thrones of the house of David.  
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem;  
They shall prosper that love thee.  
Peace be within thy walls,  
And prosperity within thy palaces.  
For my brethren and companions' sakes,  
I will now say, Peace be within thee.  
For the sake of the house of Jehovah our God  
I will seek thy good.

—*Psalm 122.*

## In the Public Place

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### VII

## In the Public Place

IT has been said elsewhere that Jesus had much more to say about private than about public devotion. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that He avoided public worship, or that His teaching of its place and usefulness in the Christian life is scanty or obscure. There are very many references in the Gospels to His presence in the synagogues and temple, and though these definitely mention his part of the service in these meeting-places of the people to be that of teaching, no one will for an instant suppose that He took no other part.

We have often wished that we might know more of His life before His public career began. Not many of us can imitate Him in the occupations of His ministry, nor can we reproduce in our

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own experience, fully at least, the circumstances that surrounded Him during those three eventful years. Most of us, however, are placed for a shorter or longer period early in life in conditions very similar to those among which He grew for almost thirty years. Another has well said, "It was during these years that His life is for us the main example of how we ought to live. This Master who was to teach all virtues, and to point out the way of life, began, from His youth up, by sanctifying in His own person the practices of the virtuous life He came to teach."

It has seemed to me that those thirty years are the necessary background to that beautiful picture given us in the fourth chapter of Luke. Into that little synagogue at Nazareth he went, "as was his custom on the Sabbath day," to worship. He had doubtless been a worshiper in that place Sabbath after Sabbath from childhood, and as now His eyes fell upon the people assembled, He would recognize friends and

## In the Public Place

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neighbors, companions of His youth and young manhood. There was the ark of painted wood that contained the sacred Scriptures; there was the elevated seat for the reader or the preacher. The leading men of the synagogue were in their places; the congregation was seated, the men on the one side, and the women, with their long veils, on the other side, behind a lattice. The place was familiar in all its appointments and persons, and the joy of being once more in the old home church, which must have had much to do in molding His life, cannot be over-estimated.

Is it not ever so? Who can ever forget the days of childhood in the old meeting-house, when, sitting side by side with father and mother, we joined in the sacred song, listened in simple awe to the lesson from God's Word, and to the prayer and sermon of the preacher? We shall never know how much of our deeper religious experience we owe to that formative period

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of our lives. We, too, can recall the place and the people, the teacher and the preacher with whom we took our first lessons in the public worship of God. That is one picture we all hang on the walls of our memory that time will not fade. What a delight it has been, after long years of separation, to go back and look in once more upon the scene! Of course it had changed. Many of the old worshipers were gone, some to other places, some to worship in the house not made with hands; but the same Spirit and Abiding Presence was there, and we have silently said, though the world changeth, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."

On this particular Sabbath day of worship at Nazareth, the Savior was in the midst of His great work. He had been teaching in the synagogues of Galilee for some weeks, and had met with general admiration and acceptance. How different it was to be in Nazareth, His old home! The services

## In the Public Place

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had already commenced when He entered, the lesson from the Law had been read, and the clerk, recognizing our Lord's right and, perhaps, His expressed desire to perform the office of reader in the second part of the service, during which a passage was read from one of the prophets, handed Him the roll of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus ascended the little platform, unrolled the volume, and found the passage recorded in the sixty-first chapter. Strangely enough, it was the prophecy concerning Himself, and with wonderful tenderness and grace, and with no less authority and power, He spoke to His old townsmen and friends. At first, they were amazed and delighted with his gracious words, but when the full meaning of His divine claims dawned upon them, they rose up in wrath and forced Him from the city, and would have destroyed Him. A strange and sad ending, indeed, to a day of worship in the old home town of Nazareth!

But the story is, nevertheless, one of

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the fullest accounts we have of our Lord's public worship. It helps us to fill in the scanty narrative of His presence in synagogue and temple. It tells us that He was an active participant in the public religious devotion of His people. Worship thus has its social as well as its personal or individual side. It is not enough that the worshiper shall enter the secret place to commune with Him who seeth in secret. Clearly does Jesus tell us by His own practice that there must be the solemn coming together of believers, both for a testimony to the world, and for the enrichment of the lives of His followers. And, once more, does this picture of Jesus reading in the synagogue the sacred roll, exalt the Scripture to its supreme place in the public worship. God speaks here not so much of the little things of our daily life as of the larger things. We take Him *with us* into the closet and tell Him there all about ourselves. In the public assembly, God takes *us*, so to speak, into His

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confidence concerning His own character and larger purposes. Our own experience has taught us that in public worship have come some of the greatest and most inspiring visions of life and duty. How often have we been carried away from our own little narrow conception of God's infinite love and purpose by the brighter vision and tender voice of the preacher, or lifted as upon wings by his prayer of faith and hope! That service will be a poor one, indeed, that fails to draw the soul heavenward in its longings and affections. The joy of fellowship is no place keener or more delightful than in the sanctuary.

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"I was glad when they said unto me,  
Let us go unto the house of Jehovah."

Have you ever observed the fact that one of the greatest hardships that come with advancing age is the inability to attend regularly the public services of the church? This is often the deepest regret expressed by aged and infirm

## Christ Our Devotional Example

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people. They miss these occasions of sweet fellowship in song and praise, and there is nothing else that will exactly take their place. There is an inspiration that comes with numbers. The song of a thousand voices and hearts all blended in one harmony almost divine will not soon be forgotten, and it makes us feel that we have a common Father and a common destiny. Says a great theological teacher, "It is through the 'unending song' of a worshiping church that the faith of Christ has been conserved upon the earth, rather than through the involved confessional creations that lie dormant in theological literature. Worship has been the great conservative of faith."

I had a dear, good friend. I think he is still my friend, though I cannot see him now with these natural eyes. One day he put his hand on my shoulder and drawing me to one side, with a tenderness in his voice and words, said, "We have chosen you to take up this responsibility and to keep these affairs

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in order and under your control." His confidence inspired me, though it filled my eyes with tears. During the years that followed, I learned to know him well, in his home, in business relations, in his hopes and fears concerning the church in general, and in particular concerning one of its important interests. Very many good things were said of him by those who took part at his funeral services, but that which most deeply impressed me was the statement made by one who had known him all his life. I cannot recall his exact language, but in substance it was this: Our friend was so strongly attached to his local church and public worship that the door of this church was never opened that he did not consider it an invitation to him to enter and take part in the service, of whatever character. He was a sweet-spirited and devout man, and no doubt would tell us that he owed much to the worship of God in His own house.

## Christ Our Devotional Example

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“How amiable are thy tabernacles,  
O Jehovah of hosts!  
My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts  
of Jehovah;  
My heart and my flesh cry out unto the living  
God.”

*Take heed that ye do not your righteousness  
before men, to be seen of them.*

FROM all vain pomps and shows,  
From the pride that overflows,  
And the false conceits of men;  
From all the narrow rules  
And subtleties of schools,  
And the craft of tongue and pen;  
Bewildered in its search,  
Bewildered with the cry:  
Lo, here! lo, there, the church!  
Poor, sad humanity,  
Through all the dust and heat  
Turns back with bleeding feet,  
By the weary road it came,  
Unto the simple thought  
By the great Master taught,  
*And that remaineth still:*  
Not he that repeateth the name,  
But he that doeth the will!

—Henry W. Longfellow.

### VIII

#### The Religion of Obscurity

JESUS was very emphatic in His teaching against all forms of religious display. Righteousness is so much a personal matter, so entirely a relation between the soul and God, that there is danger in its publicity. It is true that He says we are to let our light shine before men, but the motive must be that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven. That is very different from letting our light shine in order that we may glorify ourselves. We need encouragement to do the former; we need as much the caution not to do the latter.

This may be called Christ's law of unostentation. In our religious life we are constantly in the gaze of others, and no temptation will be greater than to seem to be what we are not. A sort

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of stage-life is that of many Christians,—mere acting, or parading before others their good qualities and deeds. By many it is done so easily and unconsciously, that the warning is all the more needful. The very fact that we are watched by others, is the invitation to substitute outward behavior for inward goodness. Jesus says, "Take heed."

∴ This law against religious display has a threefold application, all found in the sixth chapter of St. Matthew. The first is to almsgiving: "When therefore thou doest alms, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men." The act of giving alms is assumed as one of the true Christian graces. Nothing in life is more beautiful than the blossoming of the heart in cheerful and generous giving. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And just because it is a jewel of so rare value, because it is a quality of life that wins applause, the

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danger is that we may make our charity and kindness a mere display. Public giving is often necessary as an incentive to others, and, sometimes, as a protection to ourselves. It is not the mere fact of publicity that is condemned, but the motive of publicity, the spirit that would display before the world this form of our religious devotion.

How much in these days of seeking applause we need this caution against a form of self-righteousness! Some are charitable only because others are,—they must keep up at least the appearance of giving, even though they have no heart in it. Some measure their giving by that of others, and will not give until they know what others have given. Some give grudgingly, or only as their whims and fancies may determine. Still others do their alms where they know their names will be published broadcast. All of these in some way *display* their righteousness, love man's praise rather than God's, and

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they have already received their reward.

This display is just what Jesus condemns. As God is to be the rewarder, and will recompense what is done in secret, we need not hesitate to follow the direction of not letting the left hand know what the right hand doeth. Opportunities for such almsgiving abound on every hand. This is an age of a new philanthropy. Never has the church poured out its wealth to make men better and to improve the conditions of the poor, the crippled, the blind, the unfortunate of all classes, more than it is doing to-day. The movement has taken hold of the masses of the people, and by public enactment and private enterprise alike the gospel of giving is preached and practiced as never before. And yet it is true that many of God's treasures are locked and sealed against the crying needs of the world. If our religious life means anything at all, it means that we are to serve Christ

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by serving others in prompt, cheerful, generous, untrumpeted giving.

The second application of the law against religious display is to prayer. It will not be necessary here to dwell upon prayer as a means of devotion further than to say that it must not yield to a desire for show. Just as almsgiving is the soul's natural outgoing toward man, prayer is its natural outgoing toward God. The religion of the ancient Jew had a great deal of rite and ceremony, a worship that appealed strongly to the eye, and it was, therefore, easy to slip into formalism and ostentation. It would soon come to be insincere, and men would parade their piety and devotion in public places, as in the synagogues and in the streets. Prayer would be almost the first element of devotion to yield to this desire for show.

With us the danger is not so great, and yet is not the caution needed? How often is prayer a mere parading before an audience of our own most se-

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cret and personal experiences! There is a place for such plain speaking to God, but it is behind the closed door. The holy tones and endearing names used by some in addressing God are either the result of careless habit or an assumed reverence. At the best they are not in good taste, and should be carefully avoided. Every insincere word, every vain repetition, every substitute of quantity for quality, is of the nature of parade in prayer, to be seen or heard of men. Study the prayer which Jesus has given us, and you will see how simple, direct, and comprehensive it is. "After this manner therefore pray ye."

The third application of the law is to fasting. The Savior thinks of fasting in connection with almsgiving and prayer, for they are introduced consecutively and by the same formula, "When thou doest alms," "When ye pray," "When ye fast." The first two we recognize as valuable in their influence on devotional life to-day; the last

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we hesitate to think as necessary, even in the face of the fact that Christ frequently fasted and commended its practice. He assumes, at least, that it is a form of devotion, and that there is a right and a wrong method of using it.

We need not here discuss the question to what extent or how abstinence from food becomes a means of spiritual culture. It is perfectly clear, however, that in respect to food, the Christian must be under the guidance of law. The principle of fasting is expressed by Paul: "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." He was not a slave to fleshly lusts, and if there was any conflict between the higher and the lower, Paul was determined that the spiritual should be kept on top. To accomplish this would require at times vigorous treatment and even denial of appetite and sensual indulgence. Sins against the body will not help the soul in its upward flight. Moderation and even abstinence may be necessary to clear the brain and prepare the mind

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for thinking about God. All of this is assumed in this reference to fasting, but the principle emphasized is that it must be done without display. Jesus has no place for the sad countenance and the disfigured face as the result of spiritual devotion. These are not to appear to men as the evidence of such spiritual activity. Even our fasting is not to appear unto men, but unto the Father who is in secret.

What we need to do many times in our Christian lives is to examine closely the underlying motive. Is it not true that we are to a large extent under the control of custom, and that for this reason our devotion becomes insincere and mechanical? Tested by this law against religious display, how much of our conduct is little more than acting to be seen of men! It is against this that the Savior warns us, and by His gracious and tender "Take heed," He urges us to close self-examination. May we not remember that the religion of obscurity is the religion of the heart,

## The Religion of Obscurity

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and that we are not to make a show of it to the world. It is only the unseen devotion that the Father has promised to recompense.



*Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need  
of all these things.*

SINCE thy Father's arm sustains thee,  
Peaceful be;  
When a chastening hand restrains thee,  
It is He.  
Know His love in full completeness  
Fills the measure of thy weakness;  
If He wound thy spirit sore,  
Trust Him more.

Without murmur, uncomplaining,  
In His hand  
Leave whatever things thou canst not  
Understand.  
Though the world thy folly spurneth,  
From thy faith in pity turneth,  
Peace thy inmost soul shall fill,  
Lying still.

To His own thy Father giveth  
Daily strength;  
To each troubled soul that liveth,  
Peace at length.  
Weakest lambs have largest share  
Of this tender Shepherd's care;  
Ask Him not, then, "When?" or "How?"  
Only bow.

—*Charles R. Hagenbach.*

## Be Not Anxious

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### IX

## Be Not Anxious

THE Savior does not mean that we are to have no interest in or concern for the future. His own life would be a complete answer to such an argument. Moreover, He was constantly urging His disciples to look into the future, and so far as possible anticipate its emergencies and necessities. The man who proposes to build a tower must first sit down and count its cost for fear he may not be able to finish it, and thus bring shame and disgrace upon himself and friends. When the disciples were about to go out to teach the multitude, He graciously warned them what they might expect—they would be as sheep among ravening wolves, and would suffer persecution, and at last lay down their lives. Could any sadder picture

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be drawn, and could any future be more disheartening?

What Jesus did mean was to give us a right attitude toward the future, and that attitude entered into His own deepest and religious life. In a word, dark and gloomy as was the future to Him, and it was known to Him as it cannot be to us, He did not allow it to destroy the peace and usefulness of His life. It is easy for us to imagine how the future could have pressed upon Him with almost crushing weight, when He thought of how hate and malice and death would at last lay Him low. His steadiness and poise of conduct in the face of a most uninviting future are to us a marvel of confidence and inherent strength.

But what are we going to do with the ills and cares of our poor lives? No life is free from them, and to escape their depressing influence seems almost impossible. The threads become so hopelessly entangled at times that unless we set ourselves diligently to the

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task, even to the extent of giving anxious thought, confusion will lead to greater confusion and even despair. Who will disengage them if we do not? Who will take thought of our troubles unless we do, whom they directly concern?

Christ's example is happily for us a complete answer. He went on His way, not only from every great crisis, but from the thousand petty annoyances that must have consumed much of His time and strength. And in this we must follow him. No Christian has any right to allow the cares and conflicts of life to fret or incapacitate him for his work. It is true that they will come, but it is not true that we must surrender ourselves to their power. It was Luther who said that we cannot prevent the birds from flying over our heads, but we do not need to allow them to stop and build their nests in our hair. To open the doors and windows of the soul, and to let in the distracting thoughts and anxieties of the

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present and future until they have established themselves in our mental and spiritual natures is sinful because it is unbelief. It is simply saying that we doubt God's ability and willingness to help us, or indeed, whether His protection is over us at all.

"Delight thyself also in Jehovah;  
And he will give thee the desires of thy heart.

"Commit thy way unto Jehovah;  
Trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass."

These are the formulæ for care, the argument against worry. Delight in the Lord, and an absolute committing of our way to Him will drive anxious thought from every troubled life. As literally as we take a broken chair to the carpenter to be mended, as fully as we trust our physical ailments to the treatment of a skilled physician, so literally and fully are we to take our cares to Him, casting all our anxiety upon Him, because He careth for us. And when we take them to Him, let us not pick them up again, but leave them

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there, and expect Him to use His own way and time in setting them in order.

There is no place where so many of us fail as just here. We tell God all about our sorrows and disappointments, our shattered hopes and cherished plans, our misgivings and forebodings, and then as if He did not hear or could not help, we load them up again, if indeed we have ever entirely cast them off, and go on in the same fretful and distrustful way. The result is that we are completely in the power of our sadder moods, unfitted for the best service, and find no delight in ourselves or others. Let us take Jesus at His word when He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Much of our life seems like mountain-climbing, but the purer air and larger vision are compensations we may all have. If we seem to make no progress, but go round and round with hindrances of all kinds in our way, there must be some reason why it is so,

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and we should not worry about it. The summit of our faith is reached when we need not ask the reason why.

It is old but good advice to take short views of life, hope for the best, and trust in God. One of the happiest features of our earthly pilgrimage is that we are not to look far into the future. "Be not therefore anxious for the *morrow*: for the *morrow* will be anxious for itself." God never hurries. The conclusions in His logic are often drawn from premises of long standing. His plan for your life and mine must not be marred by our impatience and fretfulness. Earnest devotion to the unfolding plans of God, as day by day they are made known to us by His guidance, will keep us sweet in heart as well as pure in heart. When we do our best, we may leave the results with Him.

And this suggests the one most important thing in all this caretaking and worry: we must do our duty as God Himself indicates it to us. May there be a conflict in the things we

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ought to do? Yes, if we are making our own life's plan and are determined to walk therein. No, if we are permitting God to shape our lives, and we are anxious to follow His directions. *Do the next thing*, and that is duty. In that sense a conflict can hardly be. We must wait patiently for Him, but He will open up the way, and when He does, we must not hesitate in our response. The parent is honored by a trustful and obedient child, and God is our Father, and we are his children. He knows what is best, and He will withhold no good thing that we need.



*We must work the works of Him that sent me,  
while it is day.*

IF some great angel spake to me to-night  
In awful language of the unknown land,  
Bidding me to choose from treasure infinite,  
From goodly gifts and glories in his hand,  
The thing I coveted, What would I take?  
Fame's wreath of bays? the fickle world's es-  
teem?

Nay; greenest bays may wave on brows that ache,  
And world's applauding passeth as a dream.  
Should I choose love to fill mine empty heart  
With soft, strong sweetness as in days of old?  
Nay; for love's rapture has an after-smart,  
And on love's rose the thorns are manifold.  
Should I choose life with long succeeding years?  
Nay; earth's long life is longer time for tears.

I would choose work, and never-failing power  
To work without weak hindrance by the way,  
Without recurrence of the weary hour  
When tired, tyrant Nature hold its sway  
Over the busy brain and toiling hand.

Ah! if an angel came to me to-night,  
Speaking in language of the unknown land,  
So would I choose from treasure infinite.  
But well I know the blessed gift I crave,  
The tireless strength for never-ending task,  
Is not for this life. But beyond the grave  
It may be I shall find the thing I ask;  
For I believe there is a better land,  
Where will and work and strength go hand in hand.

—*Unknown.*

### X

## My Father's Business

LUKE gives us in his second chapter the only picture we have of the boyhood of Jesus. How eager we are to know something about the early years of a great man, and it seems strange that so little was recorded of the boy Jesus. That one picture, however, is not only beautiful in itself, but it speaks in clearest terms of the glory of His public career. In the midst of the Jewish doctors, modest and unassuming, but surprising them at His understanding and answers, He declared with a certainty and authority far beyond His years, "I must be about my Father's business," or, as in the Greek, "in the things of my Father." These words are prophetic of a busy life, and help us to get some little glimpse of that period we know so little about.

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Those who study closely the life of our Lord will be impressed at once with His wonderful activity among men. In the three short years of His public ministry, He came into close and personal contact with all classes of people, and in almost every imaginable relation. His life is in this respect in most striking contrast with that of His eminent forerunner. Of John, the dwelling-place and preaching-place was the wilderness, and into it the people thronged to hear the great preacher. His food and dress were those of one who had withdrawn from the familiar haunts of men, and though this strong but strange character was the preparing voice of the Messiah, he did his work more as a recluse than as a busy man among men.

The monastic conception of the religious life at one time largely prevailed, and is not yet altogether a thing of the past. There are some who still think that the best way and the only way to rise into a high plane of religious ex-

## My Father's Business

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perience is to live behind stone walls in monastic cells, or shut up in the huts and caves of the desert. Asceticism has not only drawn its thousands into lonely places, but has caused its devotees to punish and torture themselves in ways most cruel and revolting, all in the name of pure religious devotion. The same tendency is seen in modern life when persons betake themselves to monastery or nunnery, and take the strictest vows of poverty, chastity, and seclusion. Not a few good Christian people give expression to the same idea when they invest religion with a gloomy spirit, as if it were sinful to enjoy the good and beautiful things we find around us.

The popular impression is that Christ was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." We have even gone so far as to say that He never smiled, and that on His face no ripple of gladness ever played. But on the other hand, we do not read anywhere that a single misanthropic word ever

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fell from His lips, or that He carried gloom and sadness wherever He went. Children did not despise Him, and they would have been among the first to detect a frown. People sought Him gladly, not because His presence took from them the joy and peace of life. The Christ of the Gospels is not a somber Christ, and if we understand Him aright, our religion will not be a somber religion. If His life was hard and full of grief, it did not destroy the gladness of His heart; and we do ourselves and our religion great injustice when our piety is so cold and joyless that we see nothing of the innocent gladness and pleasure of earth.

Neither was Christ ascetic in the place or character of His work. He was the busiest of men, and His work was always done in the open, before the eyes of all. The home witnessed many of His miracles and was many times graced by His presence. It was His custom to take part in the public worship of the synagogue and temple, rather

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than be the solitary worshiper of the wilderness. He was the Christ of daily toil, busy with His hands in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. He enjoyed a feast among His friends, as we see in that one made for Him by Matthew. He attended a wedding and performed a very important service. He was the social guest of the Pharisees a number of times, and, only a few days before His crucifixion, He attended a feast in the home of Mary and Martha at Bethany. These references are abundant evidence that Jesus did not separate Himself from the society and the fellowship of the world.

And what a busy life His was! He had a definite thing to do, "My Father's business," and a time in which to do it, "while it is day." The example of His daily toil is the best proof that a consecrated life is possible in the closest association with men. This was a new phase in the history of devotion that the Master was teaching. Idleness and indifference to responsibility had

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been too long the rule. Reliance upon form and ceremony had begotten a spiritless and seclusive type of religious life, and the world could never be saved by such indifference to the needs of the people. The best way to learn what the world most needed was to mingle freely with it, and this imposed the hard task of sacrifice and self-forgetfulness. His day of toil was not long, but none has been more intense or earnest.

We, too, must be about our Father's business. There should be no place in our lives for idleness, "the night cometh, when no man can work." Much of the doubt among Christian people today is caused by their inactivity, and by magnifying their own cares. If the example of Jesus teaches anything, it is that we are to live in this world with a definite purpose, and with the conception of our divinely appointed tasks. The works of God should be made manifest in us. I have been struck with the pronoun "we" of the fourth verse

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of the ninth chapter of John's Gospel, found in the American Revision. How completely Jesus identified the work and mission of His disciples with His own! We must work the works of Him that sent me. Blessed toil is that which is heaven-sent, and in which Jesus is our companion.

Is it possible to engage in worldly affairs, and at the same time to cultivate the devotional life? Can the merchant sell his goods, the physician attend his patients, the farmer follow his plow, the good housewife serve her family, and at the same time "be about the Father's business"? These very pursuits and occupations may be the things the Father would have us do, and He would have us do them so well that He will be honored in the doing. He does not want us all to forsake our occupations in life and become ministers or missionaries; but He has given us talents that may be used for Him in the places in which he has put us. We have no right to hide them, or to refuse

## Christ Our Devotional Example

to use them. Life's truest discipline, its purest joy, its greatest reward, will consist in our devotion to our Father's business, which for many of us will be our personal influence and power over those with whom we daily mingle.

*In my Father's house are many mansions; . . .  
I go to prepare a place for you.*

WHERE is home?

Is it where stately mansions rise  
With dazzling splendor towards the skies,  
The poor man's dream—the rich man's prize?  
Where is home?

Where is home?

The humblest place beneath the skies,  
When viewed with love's devoted eyes,  
Becomes a perfect paradise!  
This is home!

Where is home?

'Tis where the heart's best treasure is,  
For perfect love is perfect bliss,  
Deny me wealth, but give me this:  
Love is home!

Love is home!

And when our earthly loves are o'er,  
And earthly mansions are no more,  
Forever, on the other shore,  
Heaven is home!

—Unknown.

## Many Mansions

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### XI

## Many Mansions

THE last night that Jesus spent with the disciples gives to us one of the most touching pictures of Gospel history. It seems that there must have been some disputing or quarreling among them, probably concerning the places they were to occupy at the supper. The question, Who should be the greatest among them? had been raised two or three times before, and as many times answered by word and illustration. It was still not fully understood, and now as if in demonstration of what He meant, He girded himself with a towel and washed the disciples' feet, wiping them with the towel wherewith He was girded. This act of Christ is in strange but most beautiful contrast with the tender announcement a little later that He would be with them only

## Christ Our Devotional Example

a little while longer. The serving Christ, teaching the lesson of humility by His own act, is the fitting prelude to that farewell discourse recorded in the fourteenth chapter of John, in which is so plainly stated the thought that He would soon be at home in His Father's house.

It is not irreverent to say that Jesus would many times in His meditation anticipate the end, when at last He could say, "It is finished." His humanity would find its chiefest support in the assurance that life's struggle would soon be over. His divinity would look forward with supreme delight to the consummation of the world-age plan for the salvation of the race, and His return in triumph to the throne of the Father. In a sense hard for us to appreciate, Jesus Christ must have remembered His Father's house, and looked forward with joy to the day of His return.

With what perfect confidence in His knowledge of the fact, and with what

## Many Mansions

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tenderness of thought concerning the disciples' need, did He say, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you." That was not the first time the thought had thrilled His consciousness and stimulated His effort. Is it not more likely to be true that it was an ever-present possession, giving Him support in every hour of trial, and inspiring Him with an unfaltering hope! The age-struggle will soon have been accomplished, and back through the clouds upon an unseen chariot, the Son of God will be carried to the throne of glory with His Father. Inspiring vision! Blessed hope!

How unselfishly He shared His superior knowledge with the disciples! He told them about the heavenly mansions, just as long before He had told them about the bitter persecutions that awaited them. It comes to us with peculiar fitness that for this last night of intimate fellowship with the faithful eleven, He had reserved the sweetest

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revelation of all. Christ had said to them before many good things, and had in their presence done many wonderful acts, but this last word, this last prophecy of the future, was the best. If "heavenly mansions" and a "prepared place" were to be the reward for service even unto death, Jesus desired His disciples of every age to find help and power in the thought that we would soon be at home in our Father's house.

I cannot understand how we can be followers of Jesus Christ and in our devotional life not think much of heaven. The best things that will come to us in our religious training are remembering Christ and looking to the mansions beyond the skies. If these were more constantly with us, by day and by night, giving vigor and expression to our thought and feeling and action, how they would transform our lives. We need such transforming agencies. Life's routine will become hard and almost unendurable, unless we have as

## Many Mansions

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the light of our day the hope and joy of heaven in remembering Jesus Christ.

There are those who say that it is a selfish passion that leads to the thought and love of heaven. If heaven were merely a place of rest, or the end of the conflicts and disappointments of earth, earnestly to desire it might not be altogether free from cowardice and weakness. But take it as it is described in the Scriptures,—in all its relations to earthly toil and suffering and desire, and as the place where our higher toils and nobler enjoyments shall begin, and the longing for heaven is the noblest and purest passion we can cherish. There is a city that doth abide, a house not made with hands.

Jesus' departure was a going home, and so it will be for us. The life beyond sometimes stretches out into a vast and unknown world, and the trembling soul shrinks back as it goes forth to meet its destiny. The grave is dark and lonely, and as we look into it with our natural eyes, there comes no light

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to drive away its gloom. Death seems a total loss, the end of all activities and realizations; but not so. "My Father's house" has removed the dread, and the thought of the home-going, to meet the Father's smile and to hear the Father's words, comes with welcoming embrace to tell us of His love. It is this vision of a loving Presence, and of a home full of light and beauty and living joy that Jesus had, and wishes us to have, as we come at last to life's outer gateway.

If it were wrong for us in our devotional life to cultivate this desire and love for heaven, He would not have told us that He was going to prepare a place for us, and then that He would come again and receive us unto Himself. It was His thought and purpose that we might be with Him in a place prepared.

In a Christian home a few months ago, the parents prepared a great surprise for their little daughter. A room was selected and without her knowledge was fitted up with everything that was needful, and with very much that

## Many Mansions

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was beautiful. The little girl's taste had been studied, and in all the furnishings, including even the devotion to her family of dolls, the father and mother sought to provide the things that would please her. On Christmas morning, they led her to the open door of this prepared place, and told her that all of this was hers. The pure and simple joy of childhood was the sufficient reward of parental love.

So Jesus is preparing a place for us, and He has told us *beforehand* all about it. He does not mean to surprise us, but desires that we shall know, and that knowing, we shall rejoice. It is as if He had thoughtfully left the door ajar that we might have a glimpse of the glory that awaits us.

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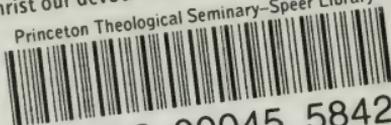






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