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I

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

THE HISTORY OF OUR Saviour's passion is about to display before us its bleeding mysteries and its awful vicarious scenes. The "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" approaches the altar of burnt-offering. Bonds, the scourge, the crown of thorns, and the cross, present themselves to our view in the distance; and the "seven words" uttered by Jesus on the cross, sound in our ears, like the funeral knell of the kingdom of Satan, and like intimations of liberty and joy to the sinful race of man.

O what wonders are we about to approach in our meditations! From the most appalling scene the world ever witnessed, a paradise of peace springs forth. From the most ignominious sufferings, we see the most glorious triumph emerge; and from the most dreadful of deaths, a divine and never-fading life arise!

May devotion, humbleness of mind, and child-like faith accompany us in our meditations, and penitential tears become our eye-salve! But do Thou, who hast the key of David, unlock for us the gates to the sanctuary of Thy sacred passion, and in the awful scenes of Thy sufferings, enable us to discover the mystery of our eternal redemption!

Almost immediately after our blessed Lord had performed perhaps the most stupendous of His miracles, in raising Lazarus from the grave, after he had been dead four days, we are informed by the Evangelist that "the chief priests and the

Pharisees took counsel together to put him to death." What a humbling view does this circumstance give us of the depravity of human nature as exemplified in these men, who, while obliged to confess the fact of the miracles which Jesus wrought, not only refused to accept Him as the Messiah, but even conspired together to rid themselves of Him by condemning Him to death! "Neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

"Jesus therefore," we are told, "walked no more openly among the Jews, but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples." But "when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem."

With this object in view, the Lord takes His twelve disciples aside. He has matters of importance to disclose to them. Destined, as they were, to lay the foundations of His Church, they soon perceive His intention, and hang upon His lips with increasing eagerness. They probably reckon on some cheering intelligence, and expect to hear that the triumphant development of His kingdom is at hand. But what short-sightedness and simplicity do they display! O the mighty chasm which intervenes between their thoughts and God's thoughts! As though the restoration of fallen man were a thing of such easy accomplishment! As if sin had caused only a transient disturbance in the relations between God and man, and occasioned a breach which could be healed, either by a voluntary declaration of mercy from on high, or by a confession of sin on the part of the fallen!

The Lord opens His mouth, and to the astonishment of the disciples, announces to them in plain terms His approaching sufferings, and at the same time His subsequent victory. "Behold," says He, "we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished."

Observe, first of all, how these words convey our Lord's fixed resolution. His heart, under the impulse of love, is firmly and immutably bent on taking the way to the cross. You well remember with what impressive earnestness He rejected the advice of Simon Peter to spare Himself, and not to go up to Jerusalem. "Get thee behind me, Satan," was His reply; "thou art an offence unto me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of man." So evident was it to Him that the sufferings He was going to meet were the express will and counsel of His heavenly Father, that in the contrary advice of His disciple, He could recognize nothing but a temptation from the bottomless pit, and Simon as the unconscious instrument of it.

No affectionate entreaty restrains Him in His course; no menace dictated by hatred deters Him from it. The bloodthirsty council has already assembled at Jerusalem, and is concocting its plan of treachery and murder. But the watchword of Jesus continues to be—"Behold we go up!" and though another Red Sea were foaming at His feet, and though a hundred deaths awaited Him, yet the only sentiment of His heart is—"We go up." For it is His Father's will, and the path to the great and ardently longed-for aim of the world's redemption. O what resignation, what obedience, what love to sinners is here exemplified by our adorable Immanuel!

"Behold," says our Lord, "we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished." Here we are informed what was His staff and His stay on the road to His sufferings. He found it in the "sure word of prophecy," in which He read what was recorded of Himself, and the counsel of God respecting Him. And if any one still requires a definite authority for the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, it is here presented to him. Christ, the King of Truth, recognizes in the Scriptures nothing less than the infallible record of the revelation of His heavenly

Father; He bears it, day and night, on His heart; He decides according to its statutes, as the Canon Law, which puts an end to all strife respecting the vital questions of human life, and directs His steps whithersoever it points the way. It is to Him the infallible guiding-star of His life. Whether the voice of His heavenly Father is heard direct from heaven, or sounds to Him from this venerable record: it is the same to Him. The one is as important as the other; and He reverently bows to every tittle and iota of it. It is thus His ways are established; and every moment's experience seals it to Him, that He is actually obeying a divine command. Every thing that the Word enjoins becomes reality.

"Certainly," some one may say, "it ought to strengthen our determination to proceed upon the path prescribed for us by the Word of God, when, like Christ, we are aware that our way through life is not only divinely ordered and superintended, generally speaking, but also when we can survey it, from step to step, in the light of an infallible and divine revelation, even to its glorious termination." But is not this really the case, if thou hast believingly and sincerely given thyself up to God? For can there be any situation in which the divine Word, with its counsel, leaves thee at a loss? Is it not also written respecting thee, "The Lord will not suffer thee to want any good thing?" "Through much tribulation thou must enter into the kingdom of heaven." But "when thou passest through the waters, they shall not overflow thee; and through the fire, the flame shall not kindle upon thee, for the Lord is with thee." It may indeed be the case that men will revile and persecute thee; but if thou faithfully endure, thy reward shall be great. The light shall always rise upon thee after the darkness; and after sorrow, joy shall again visit thy threshold. Nor shall any one be able to snatch thee out of the Lord's hands; but after having fought the good fight, thou shalt finally receive the

crown of righteousness, shalt not see death, but pass from death unto life, and triumph eternally.

Does not all this, and manifold more stand written of thee; and is not therefore thy path pointed out? Mayest thou not also say, in thy measure, with the Lord Jesus, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all shall be accomplished, that stands written by the finger of God, respecting me, a poor sinner, since I am no longer my own, but belong to Christ?" O certainly thou mayest say this! How ought we not, therefore, with such a consciousness, to put on a cheerful courage, during our pilgrimage, and feel as if heavenly triumphal music preceded us on our path through life!

My dear readers, let us place a firm reliance on the Word of truth and, in its light, ascend the precipitous road; according to its instructions, proceed forward with firm and steady steps, unmindful of the tumult of the world, and not deviating a hand-breadth from the way prescribed. Let us meet him who would direct us otherwise, with a voice of thunder, and exclaim, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of man!" The Almighty will then be favorable to us; we shall then carry the peace of God in our bosoms; and literal accomplishments of the divine promises, which we have taken for our compass, and for a lamp unto our feet, will daily fall upon our path, like lights from heaven.

The Lord's face is toward Jerusalem; and we have already seen for what purpose. His intention is to suffer and to die. O there must be something of immense importance connected with His passion! It appears as the crisis of the work for the accomplishment of which He left His Father's bosom, and came down to earth! Were this not the case, it would have been tempting God, thus to rush to meet death after having completed His prophetic office in Jerusalem; and the overruling Majesty on high would have exposed His justice to

well-founded reproach, in giving up the Holy One, who had fulfilled His commands, to the horrible fate of a malefactor and reprobate. But the Eternal Father had included in His counsels the scourge, the crown of thorns, and the cross, long before the sons of Belial thought of having recourse to these instruments of torture; and all His prophets, however reluctantly, were compelled in spirit to interweave these horrid emblems along with the majestic image of the Messiah, which they portrayed. Thus the Lord could say with profound truth, "All things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished; for he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on, and they shall scourge him and put him to death."

Such were the ingredients which filled the cup that Satan, in accordance with the counsels of eternal wisdom, was to present to the Son of the Most High. These counsels went far, very far beyond all that we understand by martyrdom, chastisement, purification, or trial. The immaculate and righteous Saviour did not require correction as for Himself; and if a purification had been salutary for Him, it needed not to have come upon the Holy One of Israel in the form of such degrading infamy, unheard-of reproach and humiliation, and such unparalleled suffering. The passion of our Lord has an infinitely more profound significancy; and it requires only a cursory glance at the narrative to discover that this was the case. Observe what the Evangelist informs us respecting the way and manner in which the twelve received their Master's communication. He states that "they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken."

How striking is this circumstance! Who can resist inquiring what it was they did not understand? They could not possibly have mistaken what their Master said respecting His suffering

and dying at Jerusalem. Yet Luke assures us that "they understood none of those things, and knew not what it was that was spoken." Is it not obvious that the Evangelist's meaning is that he who would only apprehend the history of Christ's sufferings, and regard His passion as a martyrdom, not essentially different from the bloody testimony borne by other saints, does not understand its true signification? We have here an evident reference to an infinitely deeper cause of the tragical termination of our Saviour's life before us.

It is confessedly true that the eternal Father, by an almighty decree, might have annihilated the fallen race, in which sin had taken root, and thus have put an end to evil. But we were to live and not die. And thus He has not only caused the sin of man to act as a foil for the display of the full radiance of His attributes, and especially of His love, but has also, by the offering up of His Son, provided a means of salvation by which we might attain to a much higher stage of glory and relationship to God than we once possessed in our progenitor, or than we should ever have attained if we had not fallen. Our fall afforded Him the opportunity of showing that in the destruction of sin He could not only manifest His justice, but also glorify His mercy in remitting and forgiving sin, without infringing upon His righteousness.

We sinned, and were exposed to the curse. The Word that was with God, and was God, then was made flesh. The eternal Son became our brother; took upon Himself our sin, in the way of a mysterious imputation; paid our debt to the majesty of the inviolable law; covered our nakedness with His righteousness; presented us, as those in whose stead He appeared, unblamable and acceptable to the Father; excited the hallelujahs of angels at our exaltation; elevated us to a participation of His own riches, blessedness, and privileges; pitched tents of peace for us around the throne of God; and connected us with Himself by the bonds of eternal gratitude and affection. Such is the

edifice which the Almighty reared upon the ruins of sin; and of which the disciples, at that time, had not the remotest idea. In the sequel, they recognized the divine method of salvation and of peace; and how happy were they, subsequently, in the knowledge of this "great mystery of godliness!"

II

THE ANOINTING

SIX DAYS before the Passover, and, consequently, four before the awful day of crucifixion, we find our Lord in the peaceful village of Bethany, on the other side of the Mount of Olives, where He was wont so willingly to stay. We meet with Him this time in the house of a man named Simon, where His followers had prepared Him a feast. He appears before us in the unassuming form of a guest, invited with others; but look a little more narrowly, and you will see Him, even there, as John afterward saw Him in vision, only in a somewhat different sense, as "walking amid the candlesticks."

The Lord Jesus has no need to testify of Himself; for those who are present bear witness of Him in the most eloquent manner. Look, first, at Mary and her sister Martha. They are women possessing true nobility of soul, respected by all, sensible, clear-sighted, and sober-minded. Martha, cheerful, active, and busy; Mary, thoughtful and contemplative. Both, however, rest all their hopes on Jesus. He is, to both, the living pillar which supports their heaven; their prospect of a blissful futurity arises solely from His mediation; and the peace and comfort, which refreshes them in life and death, they derive from Christ alone as the source. What a high idea must this fact alone afford us of the Man of Nazareth.

Look around you further. There are the disciples, Peter, Andrew, John, James, Nathanael, Thomas, and the rest. You formerly saw them listening to the Baptist in the wilderness,

like a flock of scattered and helpless sheep. You learned to know them as people who were incited to seek for help, by a very different motive than a mere thirst for knowledge. You found them to be men whose hearts were grievously burdened by sin, and by the anticipation of "the wrath to come," and whose inward peace was entirely at an end, after having seen God in the fiery splendor of His law, with its requirements and threatenings. Neither man nor angel was able to comfort them; but since they had found Jesus, their thoroughly humbled souls were like the sparrow which has found a house, and the swallow, a nest, where they may drop their weary wings. They are now elevated above all anxiety. What bright rays of light does this fact also shed upon Jesus! How highly does it exalt Him above the idea of being a mere mortal!

But alas! among the disciples we still find Judas, the child of darkness, the son of perdition. He, indeed, was never, in his own eyes, a helpless sinner; he had never thirsted after God; he was never truly devout; nor had ever set his affections on things above. It may be asked what induced him to force himself into the immediate vicinity of Jesus? Assuredly, first, the irresistible and overpowering impression of the superhuman greatness and dignity of the Son of David, and then doubtless, also, an ambitious desire of being called to act some important part in the new kingdom, to establish which Jesus had evidently come. Thus, the presentiment of the traitor aided in glorifying the person of the Lord. The divine majesty of Immanuel shone so powerfully through His human form that its rays penetrated even into the darkness of Iscariot's soul.

But let us further inspect the circle of guests. Who is the master of the house? He is called Simon, and bears the surname of "the Leper." He bears it to the honor of Jesus; for the name betokens what he was, before the Lord pronounced over him the almighty words, "Be clean!" Simon had once been infected with that horrible disease which no earthly

physician was able to heal, and which He alone could remove who had inflicted it—the Almighty, He who could testify, saying, "I and my Father are one."

Simon, stand forward, and show thyself to every skeptic as a living monument of the divine fullness which dwelt in Christ! All Bethany knows that he had prepared this feast for the Lord Jesus, solely from feelings of gratitude for the marvelous cure which he had experienced through Him; and even His enemies can not deny that, in this man, a monument is erected to the Lord Jesus, which speaks louder and more effectually than any inscription is able to do.

But look! Who is it that sits next to Jesus?—the young man with piercing eye and sunny countenance. Oh, do you not recognize him? Once you saw him lying shrouded on the bier. You were present when his corpse was carried out, followed by his weeping sisters and a mourning crowd. You looked down into the gloomy vault into which it was lowered. But you were equally witnesses of that which took place four days after, when One approached the grave who called Himself "the Resurrection and the Life," and then commanded the stone to be taken away from its mouth. You heard the words of Martha, "Lord, by this time he stinketh," and the majestic reply, "Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldst believe thou shouldst see the glory of God?" and then, after the stone had been removed, how the Lord, lifting up His eyes toward heaven, over the putrifying corpse, exclaimed, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always; but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me!" and then how, with a loud, commanding, and creating voice, he called down into the sepulcher, "Lazarus, come forth!" and you know what followed.

He that was once dead, now sits among the guests, having escaped from the adamantine prison of the tomb. He lives,

and is vigorous and happy; and it never occurs, either to friend or foe, to deny that Lazarus once lay as a corpse in the grave, and now lives again at the omnipotent word of Jesus. We find abundant traces that the Pharisees were beside themselves with rage and envy at this miracle, but not the smallest that any one ventured to deny or even to doubt the fact itself. There he sits, and completes the row of lights amid which Jesus walks.

Oh, then, go to Jesus, my dear readers, as the Lord from heaven, the Prince of Life, the Conqueror of Death, for such He is, when regarded even in the light that streams upon Him from the circle which surrounds Him at Bethany. And He is still something more than all this.

He is staying at Bethany. He has now accomplished His public ministry. Several times has He given His disciples of late to understand that such is the case. He has told them and revealed to them as much as they were able to bear. The Comforter, who is to succeed Him, will instruct them further. We do not see Him now retiring into silence, nor returning to His heavenly Father; but saying, on the contrary, "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it is accomplished!" He knows that the principal task assigned Him has still to be performed. He is on the road to Jerusalem, with the full consciousness of all that is passing and concerting there; that His enemies are now in earnest to seize Him, and get rid of Him; that the chief priests and Pharisees have already "given a commandment, that if any man knew where he were, he should show it, that they might take him."

All this was known to Him; but far from seeking to escape the snare which was laid for Him, He goes directly toward it. He was now—according to His own words—to be delivered to the heathen, crucified, and slain; and there was a necessity for it. "The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," was not yet sacrificed. His assertion, that "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to

give his life a ransom for many," was not yet fulfilled. The blood, to which the whole of the Old Testament had pointed as the procuring cause of all remission of sin, had not yet stained the fatal tree, but still flowed through His veins. And for this He prepared Himself on the evening He spent at Bethany.

Above all things, therefore, let us draw nigh to Jesus as our sole and everlasting High Priest, as our Mediator, Surety, and Ransom. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." The saints above "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." O delay no longer, therefore, to follow their example! Jesus, in His crown of thorns and bleeding wounds, must be the object of your love and the ground of your hope, or else He is nothing to you, and you are in danger of eternal perdition.

The Lord has just placed Himself at the table, when Mary approaches, deeply affected by gratitude, veneration, love, and with a foreboding of what is about to befall Him. She feels impelled to display to Him her inmost soul once more, and to manifest her reverential and devout attachment to Him. But how is she to do this? Words seem to her too poor. Presents she has none to make. But what she has that is valuable—possibly a legacy left by her mother—is an alabaster vessel of pure oil of spikenard, much valued in the East, and used only on peculiarly festive occasions. She brings it with her. She does not intend to pour out a few drops only, but that it should be wholly an emblem of her profound devotion to the Lord of Glory. With the utmost reverence she approaches her divine Friend, breaks unobservedly behind Him the well-closed vessel, sheds the spikenard upon His head and feet, then humbly bends herself down and wipes the latter with her loosened tresses.

"And the whole house was filled with the ointment." Yes,

we may well believe that this odor ascended up even into the throne-room of heaven, and was inhaled with delight by the holy angels. In this affectionate and symbolical act, a degree of devotedness was manifested such as is rarely exhibited. Mary desires to belong to Christ for time and eternity; to cleave to Him by faith, like the ivy to the tree, round which it entwines itself. She wishes to live in His light, like a dark planet in the beams of the sun which lends it its radiance. Mary knows no anchor of hope, no ground of consolation, no way to heaven, except through His mediation; and were she to imagine existence without Him, she could only think of herself as in the jaws of despair, and irrecoverably lost. He is her last resource, but at the same time all-sufficient for her eternal salvation. Hence she cleaves to Him with all her soul, and nothing is able to divide her from Him. He is always in her thoughts her sole delight, and the supreme object of her affections—all which she expresses in the act of anointing.

The whole circle of the guests at Bethany are deeply touched by Mary's significant act. Only in the case of one does its sweet harmony sound as discord; only one of them with repugnance rejects the grateful odor. Ah, we imagine who it is! No other than the unhappy Judas, the child of darkness. Never, probably, has frigid self-love stood in such horrible contrast with warm and sacred affection, as was the case here, in the cold and really offensive expression, "Why this waste? Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" Alas, how deeply is the miserable man already fallen! "The poor?" O thou hypocrite! As if the reason were unknown to his Master why he would rather have the ointment sold. "For three hundred pence!" He knows how to value the spikenard, but is unable to appreciate the love that provided it, for he is wholly destitute of such a feeling.

Observe how the Lord Jesus appreciates the act of Mary. Like a faithful advocate, He immediately enters the lists on her

behalf, against Judas and the transient impression made by his dark spirit upon the disciples, and says, while intimating to Judas that He was well aware of the cause of his displeasure, "Why trouble you the woman? Let her alone; she has wrought a good work on me. The poor ye have always with you, but me ye have not always. Against the day of my burying hath she kept this" (or, according to another Evangelist, "She is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.") "Verily, I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

Do but notice how He who was otherwise so spare in commending human works, mentions with a particular emphasis Mary's work as good. All the world is to know that such devotedness as Mary shows Him is considered valuable, and how highly He estimates this feeling as being the source of Mary's act. And that every one may know it, He has caused Mary's deed to be recorded. What He predicted has taken place; wherever this gospel is preached in the world, that which she did is mentioned as a memorial of her, even to this day.

Scarcely had our Lord ended this remarkable speech, when, as Matthew relates, "One of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time, he sought opportunity to betray him." Where, in all the world, can we meet with a contrast so striking, so appalling, and beyond measure dreadful, as is here presented to us in Mary's tender and affectionate act, and the horrible procedure of this unhappy son of perdition? He is already so far gone that words of compassion, which might have tended to his eternal salvation, completely pervade the unhappy man as with a mortal poison. "He went out." He turns his back upon the Saviour, because he now feels that He sees through him. He rushes out-

into the night, to which as a child of darkness, he belongs—nay, he rushes out into a more awful night than the natural one; and the divine “Woe!” follows him upon his way.

We shudder. We shrink from the idea of accompanying the wretched man, and return with increased fervor to Jesus. “Against the day of my burial hath she kept this,” says our Lord. We understand His meaning. He sees His death and resurrection at one glance. An embalming of His body was to take place while He was still alive, since there was no time afforded for it after His death. It is not to be supposed that Mary had any idea of this; but a presentiment of His approaching departure certainly affected her heart; and anticipations of its saving significance fanned the holy glow of her love to a brilliant flame, and contributed to impel her to that effusion of affection in Simon’s house which we have been just contemplating. Her Master’s love, which was even unto death, excited hers in the highest degree; even as the love of His people is wont to be enkindled, most of all, by the remembrance of Christ’s sufferings.

But wherever the love of Jesus finds room, there will never be a want of activity in relieving the distress of others. “The poor,” says our Lord, while casting the words like an arrow into the soul of Judas, “the poor ye have always with you,” by which He means that Mary will not be deficient in her charity to them. “But me,” He adds, in conclusion, “ye have not always,” and these words are addressed to all my readers, who can not yet call Jesus their Saviour.

O take them to heart, my friends! Him you have no longer, when the wings of death suddenly overshadow you, or when your senses depart under the influence of disease, and the message of salvation no longer penetrates through the crowd of unbridled imaginations. You have Him no longer, when God, the righteous Judge, gives you up at length to “strong delusions,” and permits them to take up their permanent abode in your

minds, because you have long enough hardened yourselves against His calls to repentance. You have Him no longer, when the last great "hour of temptation," with its infernal delusions, as well as with its persecuting horrors, shall break in upon you, and when—to use the prophet's words—"Your feet shall stumble upon the dark mountains." You have Him no longer, if, in the abundance of your prosperity, you are ready to exclaim, with the man in the Gospel, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: eat, drink, and be merry!" to whom the horrifying announcement was made, "Thou fool! this night shall thy soul be required of thee." Therefore "flee from the wrath to come!" Hasten to save yourselves. Stay not in all the plain. Let nothing hinder you from immediately repairing to the blessed Saviour, who has so graciously assured us, that whosoever cometh unto Him, He will in no wise cast out.