

The Mediator
Between
God And Man

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II.

THE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.

"O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me."—JOHN xvii. 25.

In the special exercises of the Sabbath, as compared with our ordinary occupation on other days, we labour at a great disadvantage, because of the comparative dimness of spiritual vision, and faintness of spiritual impressions. Sense rules in human life like a tyrant, and oppresses spirit. It is yet another example of the strong crushing the weak. It is an unequal match, like that between the grown lad Ishmael and the yet infant Isaac. The right was with Sarah's son, but the might, as yet, lay with the athletic young Egyptian. The spiritual within us, even where it is alive, is like a feeble infant: the sensual treads it under foot, and mocks its helpless struggle. There is, indeed, an assured hope that the child of promise, once born, will grow apace, and in his manhood both assert the right and wield the power; but the Church, in the meantime, has bitter cause to mourn that the things of the Spirit are faintly felt, and the things of the flesh lord it in the life of her members.

On this account we are fain to set forth spiritual things in forms of sense. By means of a parable Nathan contrived to plunge his arrow deep in the conscience of the king, before old Adam in the transgressor was aware

of danger, or ready for defence. Aiming here with all our weapons at the soul, we are fain, notwithstanding, to employ the body as a handle to direct our blow.

In the march of humanity across the plain of time, the front ranks have reached the brink of a mighty river. We pause, and cluster on the bank, and wistfully gaze upon a happy, heaven-like shore beyond. A broad, dark, deep tide is rolling past. It is like a sea of wrath. There is no way over, and no safety here. Oh, wretched men that we are, who shall deliver us? We are pursued; we are ready to perish. On yonder heights the saved are singing the song of victory; but a gulf impassable lies between us and them.

Lo, while we look, a rock rises in the midst of that gloomy stream, towering broad and high above its angry waves! At mid-channel there is an island now. Next, see, between that island and the happy shore beyond, the gulf is securely bridged. The island and the heaven behind it have become one, and throngs of shining messengers pass and repass between them. But, lo! as we look and long for that blessed place, which seems "inaccessible and full of glory," the island stretches hitherward, and touches the shore on this side at our feet. A broad solid path from the mighty mid-stream rock abuts upon the bank where the tremblers stand; and now in thronging ranks they are marching over from death unto life; and now the foremost are mingling with the multitude already saved, where no enemy shall ever enter, and whence they shall go no more out.

Now, if this were the actual state of the case,—if both

the danger and the safety were of such material and palpable character, preaching would be easy work; or rather, preachers would be needed no more. That the way to life is open would be argument enough for all to flee. Mankind, with one consent, would turn and live; not one infatuated procrastinator would be left behind. Men will, of their own accord, and with all their might, flee from the death which they really dread, to the life which they really love.

And yet all this is real, although it is not seen. The danger has been incurred, and we lie exposed to it; the deliverance has been wrought, and we are invited to accept it. The river of divine wrath flows between the sinful and the holy home of the saved. We are the men who stand on the hither shore of that fathomless flood. Whether we slumber senseless or cry in agony, we cannot save ourselves. God's Son has come from heaven, and stood in the midst of that flood. He, in the midst of that flood, is one with the righteous Father beyond and rebellious children here. He is God's way to us—our way to God. There is salvation in Christ, and no salvation in any other. All this is, and on all this our eyes will open one day: would that our eyes were opened on it now, for "now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation!"

All this is declared here by the Lord's own lips. He proclaims—he is the way unto the Father. He speaks not here to us; but he does a greater, a kinder thing. He speaks about us to the Father, and permits us to stand so near that we may overhear his words. The

whole case of sinners, and for sinners, lies in this short sentence of the Mediator's prayer. It is arranged in two great natural divisions, together covering all the space and all the time wherewith the human race are concerned, thus,—

I. The alienation of the whole world from God by sin: "Righteous Father, the world hath not known thee."

II. The reconciliation of some out of the world to God, through a Saviour: "But I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me."

I. The alienation of the whole world from God by sin: "Righteous Father, the world hath not known thee."

In this solemn rehearsal of the judgment for our warning before the time, the two parties are the same as they will be when the judgment itself is set, and the books opened,—the just God, and rebellious men. Speaking to the Father, the Mediator intimates that he is righteous; speaking of the world, he intimates that it knows not God.

I. Righteous Father. Father is, indeed, an endearing name, but he is a dear child who employs it. He is in the bosom of the Father: him the Father heareth—loveth always. He who is Father to the obedient bears another relation to the rebellious. He is the world's maker, owner, witness, judge.

Accordingly, the Mediator, in view of men's desert,

in the light, opening their bosoms to the blaze of a noonday sun; and they are all fair: they are "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." Who are these that stand, as it were, around the throne of God, in white clothing; and whence came they? These are they that have come from various places on the surface of the earth and sea. Some have come from the briny ocean, and some from miry land; some from yellow, overflowing rivers, and some from cool crystal springs; some from stagnant pools in lonely deserts, and some from the slimy bed of the Thames or the Clyde, when living creatures can scarcely breathe upon their banks. All are alike welcome to these heavens, and all in their resurrection state equally pure.

May I, spiritually distant and unclean—may I rise, like these snow-white clouds, from earth to heaven, and take my place without challenge among the stainless witnesses who stand round the Redeemer's throne? I may,—not because my stains are few; but because the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin. I may—not because my sins are small, but because my Saviour is great.

Each nation followed its own form, but all departed from the living God. They worshipped wood and stone, beasts and birds, and creeping things. The worshipped being neither fatherly nor righteous, the worshippers were neither happy nor good.

As oil cannot mix with water, the sinful do not, cannot love the holy. What you do not love, you either never begin, or soon cease to know. Because God is just, and the world unjust, the world, by the sure operation of changeless laws, is ignorant of God. Our first parents, when sin was young, and sinful habits not yet hardened by frequent exercise, gave way to the evil instinct, but were simple as little children in their plan. They hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. The tendency was there: already the fool said in his heart, No God. But the art of hiding from the Holy was yet in its infancy. Uneasy guilt soon found out deeper coverings. In a few generations men had succeeded in placing a thicker shade between their own consciences and the face of God. A false worship and a wicked life, woof and warp of the intervening veil, were woven and wauked into each other, until no painful ray of holy light from heaven could penetrate to disturb the world, lying asleep in its sin. "Darkness covered the earth, and thick darkness the people."

But if the righteous God should come to these rebels and close with them in their hiding-place, willing or not willing, they would be compelled to know Him. Yes, as the lost know him when the day of grace is done. While Israel, his own, to whom he came, were tempting Je-

over for relief from all finite principalities and powers, to that "God over all, blessed for ever," who saves to the uttermost of the numbers that come and the uttermost of the necessities of each—who has room in his home and in his heart for all the captives that may be taken from the god of this world, although they come like the dew of the morning. Oh, how far flashed the eye of Emmanuel, how widely spread his love, when he pointed to the little group of fishermen on the hill-side, and said, "Father, these have known that thou hast sent me!" Have you felt these "bands of a man" falling on you, brother, and do you yield to their gentle heavenward drawing?

"These" were no more able than the world was to meet and know for themselves a righteous God. The contrast does not consist in the short, blunt antithesis that the *world* do not know God, but *these* do. The saved know God indeed; but they know him in the Mediator. Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God *through him*. Like David (Ps. xliii.) they come to the altar, and approaching God thus, they find him to be, not a terror, but an "exceeding joy."

It is not only the knowledge of Jesus, it is the knowledge of him as the messenger of the covenant, in the dignity of his person and the completeness of his work: "These have known that thou hast sent me." To know and accept the Mediator whom God has sent, as God has sent him, is life eternal. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. The sending of his Son to save sinners is the act and aspect of the Father, whereby sinners are

subdued and won: "No man cometh unto me, except the Father *which hath sent me* draw him."

The *sending* is divine love embodied, which constrains me to come; when I come, I come in faith to the *Sent*; and through him I stand accepted before the *Sender*.

On either side, at extremest distance, and in deepest alienation, stand *God* and the *world*. Forth from God on the one side, towards the world, comes *Christ* the Mediator; from the world on the other side, drawn by manifested mercy, *these* come to Christ. All are lost by sin; of the lost, those who come to Christ are saved.

These! Ay, but they are the apostles and evangelists, and saints and martyrs—the great and good of other days—they may come and be accepted; but what consolation lies there for us, who have no such character and no such claim?

You grievously misread the record; look again to the list of names that are written in the Lamb's book of life. Matthew the publican is there; James and John are there, who meanly sought to steal a march upon absent brethren, and get, by dint of early application, the foremost place in heaven; Peter is there, not *with*, but *after* all his denials and curses; Saul of Tarsus is there, with no stain of Stephen's blood now on his garments; the crucified thief is there; and time would fail to tell the numbers or kinds of chief sinners who are there, forgiven, and renewed, and accepted in the Beloved.

See these pure white clouds that stretch, in ranks like rolling waves, across the canopy of heaven in the still, deep noon of a summer day. Row after row they lie

and in anticipation of his own vicarious suffering, while he enjoys the Father's love, makes mention of the Judge's righteousness. There is a special reason why this, rather than any other divine attribute, is introduced. It is first and mainly in his righteousness that God has to do with sinners; that the sinners' substitute has to do with God. Deep cause had our Redeemer to cry, "Righteous Father," when he was approaching unto God for us. Righteousness is God's first requirement and our first need. For this the hypocrite toils, as he clothes his nakedness with filthy rags; for this the humble hunger and thirst; for this the law rages like the sea in a storm; and this in divine perfection the Lord Jesus has wrought out, and brought in, and offered free. Appearing as the advocate and substitute of the guilty, our Lord Jesus owns that righteousness must be the rule of judgment, and consents to meet the demand.

2. "The world hath not known thee." The world! who and what are these? The whole human family. And what ails them? All evil things in one,—they know not the righteous Father. The world was made for man, and man for God. The upper link gave way, and all that depended on it fell. Man rebelled, and carried away from its allegiance a subject world. When the god of this world displayed all its kingdoms before the Man of Sorrows in the wilderness, a glory, winsome to human senses, glittered on their treasures and their armies, their sceptres and their crowns. But in the view of pure spirits, alike the one Supreme, and the myriads subordinate, they were only heaps of corrupting dead.

the other all the ransomed Church, with Jesus, in the midst, Mediator, laying his hand upon both. The parties are—(1.) Righteous Father; (2.) I; (3.) These. In two features the second scene is different from the first. In that clause which tells who do not know God, it is the whole world; in this clause which tells who do know him, it is only a portion of the world—"these," the disciples of Jesus. Further, while in both clauses alike, God and men occupy the two extremes, in the second "one like unto the Son of God" is seen standing between them.

"Righteous Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee." They have not known thee: there is the gate of heaven shut; the little word "*but*" becomes the hinge on which it opens, and as it opens we see Jesus "the way unto the Father." This is the very key-note of the Scriptures: when men and all their efforts are conclusively shut up in sin and into wrath, then Christ appears, alone undertaking redemption, alone finishing the work. *Not the world, but I*, might be made the motto of the gospel, whether you have respect to the fulfilment of the law, or the expiation of sin; to the work accomplished, or the price paid.

Who shall tell how much is contained in the short expression, "I have known thee?" It is a great deep. Two ways of knowing God are possible to creatures. The holy know him by tasting his love, and the unholy by bearing his anger. Both the classes who do know him, and both alike, know him righteous. In which of these two ways does the Lord Jesus know the Father? In both. As the well-beloved of the Father, Jesus knows

him by lying in his bosom; as our substitute, he knows him by bearing the wrath due to sin.

It must be in this second sense mainly that the intercessor in our text speaks of knowing the Father, for he stands here specifically as the daysman. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" only Jesus; for he has felt it all: with the lost it is not yet all over, and on the saved it will never come. When men fell, and the curse followed; when the covenant was framed, and all that the guilty deserved was laid to the account of the surety; when in Gethsemane his prayer for a less bitter cup was rejected, and the agony of his soul supernaturally rent the interior vessels of his body, so that the life-blood flowed from the pores; when the soldiers mocked, and the multitude reviled him; when the Jewish priests accused, and the Roman ruler condemned him, for owning that he was the Son of God; when, dying on the cross, he was forsaken both by God whom he served, and men for whom he suffered,—the Son knew the Father,—knew him righteous to punish sin, that we might know him merciful to pardon it.

What next? We read, "The world have not known thee; but I have;" and will the next clause be, Therefore the world shall never need to know God as the judge and the avenger? No. As long the text speaks of the departure, the word is the *World*; as soon as it begins to tell of the return, the word is *These*. All go away from God by wicked works; but all do not come back through faith in a mediator. As to the alienation, "there is none righteous, no, not one;" as to the recon-

cing, although the new and living way is open, "few there be that find it."

But while in faithfulness we fix attention on the fact, that fewer return than went away, we must beware of limiting the number of true disciples more than the master meant. By "these" he intended to designate not only the little band of Galileans who stood within hearing while he interceded with the Father, but also all in every land and every age who should receive in faith the word of these earliest witnesses. In express and emphatic terms within the compass of this same prayer (ver. 20.) he has made it known and left it on record, that in the crisis of his saving work his watchful eye and compassionate heart were fixed alike on all his people, out to the furthest bounds of the earth and down to the latest periods of time.

Our Saviour is God. The divinity of Christ is a most precious practical truth. It is sweet in our extremities to know that our Friend, our Brother, is omnipotent and omniscient. He who keeps the stars in their places, and knows the numbers of the sands, will keep the seed of Abraham, although they multiply beyond the limits of the promise, neither missing one in the multitude nor growing weary under the weight of all. The first Napoleon, according to the history which seems authentic, was, at a crisis of the war in Syria, embarrassed with some thousands of prisoners whom he was unable to retain and unwilling to restore. He cut the knot by killing them all. Out of this eater may come forth meat, if the horrid tale, making you shudder in every nerve, throw you

with the cruel taunt, "Tell us who thou art," the devil, from a deeper knowledge, was uttering the confession, true, though not trustful, "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God."

It is of God's mercy that the world, as yet, do not so know God. "Our God is a consuming fire," and therefore it is well that he hideth himself awhile from the withered thorns. "Without God in the world," is a specific characteristic of the unrenewed; but beyond this world, every eye shall see him.

Such, apart from the Mediator, is the condition, and such the doom of men;—in this world, ignorance of God, caused by dislike of his holiness; in the world to come, knowledge of God, obtained by experiencing his wrath against sin. Such inevitably would have been the course and end of all, if Christ had not, in the covenant of mercy, come to us; such actually will be the course and end of every one still who does not in the day of mercy come to Christ. It is a foolish thing to remain willingly ignorant of the living God through life, and a fearful thing to fall, at death, into his hands.

II. The reconciliation of some out of the world to God through a Saviour: "But I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me."

In the first portion of the text there are only two parties; in the second portion there are three. There you behold on one side the righteous Father, on the other side the fallen world, with the chasm of enmity between. **Here** behold on one side the same righteous Father, on