

The Path of Faith

or,

“Let us go forth to Him.”

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MATTHEW xiv., xv., xvi. *

IN this scripture the Lord was instructing the disciples in the fact that they were being called out from everything of man, to find everything in Christ. This is the lesson we have to learn, and we are very slow in learning it. He has called us out *to Himself*, to know Him as Lord, as Head, and as Son of God.

The disciples in the ship represented the Jewish remnant during the time of Christ's absence while He is gone on high. Left here in the world exposed to all the hostile power of Satan and men, they found themselves on the sea tossed by the waves which threatened to destroy them. The waves represent the nations moved and agitated by Satan against everything that is of God here. Finally, the Lord came to them, and the storm ceased. So it will be in the end of the age; the Lord will

* Substance of an address given at Edinburgh, May 21, 1912.

appear, and destroy all the power of the enemy, and bring salvation to His persecuted saints on the earth, and they will reach the haven of their hopes.

But Peter represents the present Christian position. We do not look for the Lord's present interposition to destroy the power of the enemy, nor to change our present circumstances, but rather to be maintained in His power in superiority to the adverse circumstances in which we find ourselves. Peter first saw the Lord walking on the water. He was manifestly in complete superiority to the power of evil here. Then Peter said, "If it be Thou, bid me come to Thee." His affections were right; he desired to be with the Lord. Christ was not in the boat, hence Peter was prepared to leave it to join the Lord; and getting the word of command, he left the ship to go to Jesus, scarcely realizing what was involved in so doing. Nothing but the word of Christ would have justified him in leaving the Jewish ship. This he did really on the day of Pentecost. This would have been impossible before the Holy Spirit came; hence the Lord bade the disciples tarry at Jerusalem until they should be endued with power from on high. Leaving the ship involves leaving

everything on which the flesh naturally depends for support. Judaism was a divinely ordered system for the support of man in the flesh. The worldly systems of the present day have been devised by men for the support of the natural man. To leave such systems brings us into a position in which we are wholly dependent upon the power of the Lord. To be identified with the testimony of God, and to follow Christ, is to take up a position which would naturally be impossible, because we shall find ourselves opposed by all the power of Satan and the world. Yet it is the position in which we can be with the Lord, enjoying His company and support. He is on high making intercession for us, and His Spirit is sure to support us. We see Him in complete superiority to all the power of evil here; all is under His feet, and He is able to maintain us in superiority also. We see this in Peter on the day of Pentecost, and in Paul at Rome (2 Tim. iv.).

When a person discovers that he cannot identify the Lord with the worldly system in which he finds himself, he naturally desires to leave it, and find a place where He can be with the Lord, and enjoy His company and support. He says, "If it be Thou, bid me come to *Thee*."

It is not simply coming out from something wrong, but coming out *to the Lord*. It may be that a person leaves one boat to find a better one. I fear that some have looked upon "Brethren" as a better boat; they expect to find support in the new company they have joined, and are disappointed when they do not find the support they had looked for. Such have not come out *to the Lord*, they have come out to the brethren. I say to such, What have you come out to? It is a very real thing to come out *to the Lord*. If we have so done, we shall never be disappointed, we shall find Him all-sufficient, whatever tribulation we may find ourselves in, and no one is ever steady if he has not definitely come out *to the Lord*.

The position is one in which we are wholly and constantly dependent upon the Lord; hence it is a path of *faith*, and without faith it is impossible. The love of Christ is the motive spring which alone will cause any saint to move in such a path, but faith maintains him in it. We see with Peter how for a moment his faith failed; he looked at the boisterous elements and was afraid. His eye was off the Lord, and he realized his own weakness and began to sink. If walking in faith you *see the Lord*, you don't look at yourself, or your

circumstances. When you see the Lord, you are in peace. Peter was allowed to feel his own weakness, but when he called upon the Lord, he found salvation in Him. The Lord answered the cry of faith, and stretched out His hand and supported Peter, so that he walked on the water in the power of the Lord. We often dwell on the fact that Peter began to sink, but the great point to seize is that in the power of the Lord he *walked on the water*. The Lord was his only resource, but He was an all-sufficient resource, and was able to maintain Peter in His own superiority to the power of evil here. Paul could say, "I can do all things *through Him* who gives me power." In the case of Peter, the Lord did not alter the circumstances. He did not put forth His power to still the storm. He manifested His power *in Peter*, maintaining him in superiority to the circumstances.

He can do the same thing for us. He can maintain us in present salvation, but there must be faith on our part : "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." The power of the Lord is available for us as it was for Peter ; we have only to call upon Him. He is in the place of power, and He exercises that power on behalf of His people

here. We have come out *to the Lord* to prove the sufficiency of His grace and power to support us here, in what would otherwise be an impossible position. If we sink, as many Christians do, under the pressure and power of things here, it is because our eye is off the Lord. Do we understand what it means to have come out, not to "brethren," but *to the Lord*? If so, we shall not be confounded, whatever may happen.

If we have been called out from everything of man, we need to know and appreciate the Lord in various ways. In Matt. xv. 29-39, He is seen as Head. In the previous chapter He is seen as *Lord*, but here as *Head*. One thought which is connected with headship, is that of supply. For this thought we may refer to two passages: Col. ii. 19, and Eph. iv. 8-13. As Head He is capable of filling all things; in the coming day He will fill the whole universe of God. At the present time He fills His body the church. He has ascended up far above all heavens, and from that exalted position He has given gifts, and through these He supplies all that is necessary for the self-building up of the body. It is from the Head that the whole body (that includes all saints on the earth at any given time) is

ministered to, and united together, so that it increases with the increase of God. How wonderful to think of the whole church on earth being ministered to by the one Great Head in heaven. He loves the church, and nourishes and cherishes it. Hence there can be no lack where He is recognized and honoured as the Head.

This is illustrated in the incident of the feeding of the multitude. First of all He tested the disciples. When He proposed to feed this great multitude, the disciples were confounded. They said, "Whence should we have so many loaves in the wilderness as to satisfy so great a crowd?" If they looked to themselves and their visible resources, they were discouraged, they had no resource. Then the Lord showed them that He was their resource. If there was only faith to avail themselves of what there was in Christ, there could be no lack. The more we realize that we have no resource in ourselves, that we are outside of all what is of man, the more we appreciate the fulness we have in Christ. We learn then the great gain of being cast wholly upon Him, and what a real thing it is to have such a Head. The Lord took the loaves and the fishes, and having given thanks, He gave

them to the disciples, and the disciples distributed to the people. He graciously used the disciples as vessels of supply. There was abundance, all were satisfied, and there was plenty left over for the disciples. Thus they learnt, and we may learn, that if we cannot look to ourselves for anything, we can look to Him who is the Head and obtain abundance.

This is as true to-day as in Pentecostal times. Whatever has failed, the Head has not failed. We can therefore well afford to come out and leave all human arrangements and take a position in which we are shut up to Christ. It is a great thing to see, that even in days of general confusion, it is open to saints, however few and feeble, to come together in the faith of *what Christ is to the church* apart from all ecclesiastical assumption. Any who do so, and are found holding fast the Head, will prove what a great reality it is, and they will find themselves in a wealthy place, with inexhaustible resource. We have proved this a hundred times over. It is not simply a matter of doctrine, but an experimental reality. We can thankfully bear testimony to the faithfulness of our Head. If we have ever lacked, it has been when we have forgotten Him, when we have come together supposing

that we had some resource in ourselves or in one another, in some honoured servant it may be, through whom the Lord has ministered to us in the past.

Why is it that there is so much dearth among God's people to-day ? They are impoverished. The reason is that they do not recognize and honour the Head of the church. They have set up a human order of ministry to which they look for their supply. They have gone back to what is of man, they have hewn out to themselves cisterns which can hold no water. We do not sufficiently realize the mercy of the Lord in delivering any of us from man's order, and opening our eyes to what Christ is to the church, and what the church is to Christ. We can surely speak of the Lord's grace and faithfulness, of His unabated interest in His assembly, and of His ability to feed His flock with food convenient for it. We have proved all this over and over again ; we are constantly proving it. He ministers through the gifts, and no ministry is effectual but that which comes directly from the Head. We can rejoice in the gifts, because in them we recognize the grace of the Head, and His care for His church, and we need them all. To despise the gift, is to despise the grace of the Head,

and that must be to our loss. Each one has his own special line of service which he has received from Christ, and all are necessary to the good of the church.

In chapter xvi. we have the Son of the living God as the Rock, the foundation, and the builder of the divine system. The Rock gives the idea of stability, nothing can shake that which is built upon a rock. In the Son of the living God, we get the thought of life beyond the power of death. The church is a living structure composed of living stones. The whole assembly, as viewed in this passage, is instinct with the life of Him who builds it. Then in the Son of the living God we see the divine wisdom, intelligence, and power of the builder. There is no room for any imperfection, or break-down, or failure of any kind. The gates of hades shall not prevail against it. This structure is growing unto a holy temple in the Lord. It will be the eternal dwelling-place of God, and the centre of light and blessing for the whole universe of God. In the midst of all the evil and confusion we see around us in this world, this building is constantly proceeding without any interruption. It is carried on by the work of God in the souls of men. It is the object of interest to

the principalities and powers in the heavenly places who are learning in it the all various wisdom of God.

In our thoughts we must be outside everything of man if we are to understand what God is building by Christ at the present time. He does not adopt any thing which is of man in His building, neither the wisdom, nor the power of the natural man. God is acting altogether outside of the Adam man; it is entirely outside of flesh and blood. Christ, the Son of the living God, is the beginning of the divine structure—the assembly. There can be nothing before the foundation, as it says (Col. i. 18), “Who is the beginning, first-born from among the dead.” And again, “He is the beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. iii. 14). The force of the word translated “beginning” is that of cause or origin. Nothing comes into God’s building which is not derived from Christ. On Peter making His confession, the Lord said, “Thou art Peter,” that is, a stone. This name was intended to indicate not what he was as a natural man, but what he was as the result of the work of God, and in connection with the purpose of God. A stone is a piece of the rock. As born of God, he was of a divine

origin, and as such was of the same nature as He who is the Rock.

The Christ is the anointed man, that excludes every other order of man. But when we think of Him as the Son of God, we think of Him as a man of divine origin. "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee." Now the saint, as born of God, is of the same origin and as the same order as Christ. "As He is, so are we in this world." (Note, as to His *person*, Christ was the Son eternally. But the term "Son of God" is always applied to Him as man born in time—Ps. ii. ; Luke i. 35, etc.) The building is new, and the material is new. It is all new creation. What is God's new creation abides for ever. The church as viewed here embraces all that God has wrought in saints from the day of Pentecost until the Lord comes. What began at Pentecost is still growing unto an holy temple in the Lord (Eph. ii. 21). It is most important that we should understand what God is doing in the present time, and the nature of His building. We get the thought of building all through Scripture. God is building, and the devil by man is building. The result is seen in the book of the Revelation. In Genesis x. we get the beginning of that which the devil is build-

ing through man. The end is the great city Babylon, and the kingdom of the beast which will be destroyed by the Lord. The end of God's building is the holy city, new Jerusalem, and the Kingdom of the Son of Man. All the present activity which we see around us, religious or political, goes to the building up of one or other of these great systems. Only what is of God will abide when all that is of man will have been destroyed. If we are in communion with the mind of God, and have intelligence as to what He is doing, we shall be delivered from all the thoughts and works of man.

What is being built now, the church, will be the centre and glory of all God's works, of the whole universe of God. We get this larger thought in Hebrews iii., "He that built *all things* is God." "All things" represents the universe of God.

When a person says everything is gone, and everything is ruined, it shows he has not got his eye on what God is building, or in other words he is not looking at the church according to the purpose and work of God, and as it will be displayed in glory. If we only take account of the church in connection with the responsibility of men, we might well be discouraged.

Hence the importance of seeing it according to God. “*My assembly.*” This expresses the delight Christ has in what He is building for God. It is the chief object of Christ’s interest on the earth at the present time.

Yet what is of such interest to God and to Christ, does not appeal to man, it is outside his ken. It is a spiritual system, and can only be taken account of by those who are spiritual. It cannot be seen, and never will be until it is displayed in glory. No doubt the church in its outward visible form has failed and broken down. But in its spiritual character it will abide for ever the vessel for the fullest display of the glory of God, “To whom be glory in the church in Christ Jesus throughout *all* ages.”

May the Lord grant to us to be so outside all that is of man in our thoughts, that we may be prepared to be taught of God, and thus be brought into communion with His mind.

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