

SUBSTANCE OF A SERMON PREACHED BY MR. C. HEMINGTON, AT GOWER
STREET CHAPEL, LONDON, ON 12th FEBRUARY, 1893

Text: "While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him." (Luke ix.34,35).

That was a most blessed word which Christ spoke to His disciples when He said: "But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God" (verse 27). We must all of us taste of death, we must know what it is to die; but for real believers in Christ the sting of death is taken away. They are redeemed from death, but, for all that, they must, so far as their bodies are concerned, taste of death. It is death which conveys the souls of men - good men and bad men, the wicked and the godly - into another world. The souls of the wicked are conveyed by death into hell, and the souls of the righteous are conveyed by death into heaven (Luke xvi. 22,23). But, before I go further, let me ask you this plain question, Where will your soul go when you die? Will it go to heaven, or will it go to hell? Where will my own soul go when I die? Will it go to heaven, or will it go down to hell? May we be enabled, through the Spirit of God, to take those blessed words of Christ personally unto ourselves! "I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." If by faith we have seen Christ; if by faith we have seen the Son of man coming in His kingdom - that is, in His kingdom of grace into our souls; if we have been convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; if, as sinners, we have been condemned in our consciences by God's holy law; if we have been brought truly to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and in His word; if we have seen and felt something of Christ in our hearts - then that settles the question as to where our souls will go when we die. What a mercy it is that God has not suffered us to die in our sins! What a mercy I often feel it to be that God should not have cast me down to hell in my sins, in my unregenerate state! O, the infinite, boundless mercy of God in saying to all His elect, and speaking thus to all who are real believers in His dear Son: "Ye shall not taste of death till ye have seen the Son of man coming in His kingdom" (Matt.xvi.28).

I hope, before I close, to make some spiritual use of our text. But, before I do so, I want, with the Lord's help, to speak to you upon the transfiguration, because it was to the transfiguration

that Christ referred when He spoke to the disciples those blessed words contained in the 27th verse. It was eight days afterwards that Christ "took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray" (Verse 28). (Now just a remark here by the way. Matthew and Mark mention only six days, Luke says "about an eight-days"; but there are no discrepancies in God's Word. I do not say there are no inaccuracies in the translation, but there are no inaccuracies in the Word of God. Luke includes the day of Christ's conversation with His disciples (when He uttered those words of verse 27) and the day of the transfiguration. Matthew and Mark mention the six clear days between. The apparent discrepancy is thus easily reconciled.) Then Christ "was transfigured before them" (Matt.xvii.2). What was the transfiguration? Christ underwent no change in His Person, either in His Godhead or in His humanity; but it was a change in appearance. Just as, when the sun in the heavens passes from behind a black, heavy cloud, it shines forth with great brilliancy and glory, so, when Christ was transfigured upon the mount, His glory (which had previously been hidden and eclipsed like the sun behind the cloud) burst forth; and, through the almighty power of God upon the souls of the disciples, they were enraptured with the sight and were filled "with joy unspeakable," as Peter speaks, "and full of glory" (I Pet.i.8). They might have said, in the language of one of our hymns:

"How wide Thy glory shines!
How high Thy wonders rise!" (207)

"And, behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias" (verse 30). Moses was the distinguished servant of God by whom the law was given, and whose institutions were typical of Christ. Therefore it was very appropriate that Moses should appear on the mount at this time when his prophecies and types were about to be fulfilled and when all his sacrificial rites were about to be for ever abolished. Elijah was the distinguished prophet of God who was taken from earth without seeing death. So that I take Moses as representing all those saints of God who went to heaven before the day of the Lord's incarnation, as well as of those saints of God that would live and die and go to heaven in all succeeding generations down to the time of our Lord's second coming.

When Moses appeared on the mount, where did he come from? He came from heaven, where he had been with God and the spirits of the just (Heb.xii.23) ever since the moment that he died on mount Nebo. What does this show us? It shows us very clearly and blessedly that all believers in Christ go to heaven when they die; they go as living, intelligent spirits and stand before the throne of God. The souls of God's saints do not remain in a state of stupor and unconsciousness between death and the resurrection, but they pass at death immediately into the presence of God (II Cor. v.8).

Those who are standing upon the threshold of an eternal world as dear children of God - and there are a few here whom I have known for years - can, in their calm moments and in their measure, say with Paul: "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (II Tim.i.12). And some of you are longing to be gone, praying not so much

"Prepare me, gracious God,
To stand before Thy face" (471)

but praying more particularly, "all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come" (Job xiv.14). Well, beloved brother, in a very little time death will do its work and your ransomed soul will not go into a state of stupor, but it will go at once into the presence of God.

Moses, then, was brought by God. This is a wonderful thing, and it will bear a deal of reflection when you get home if God should so lead your minds. Moses was brought from heaven to earth (bear that in mind!) in order that he might represent the whole glorious company of the redeemed, or that part of them that were to die before going to heaven. And let us bless our God for His wisdom, love, and mercy in thus bringing Moses, a departed saint and a glorified spirit. God did not merely represent Moses to the minds of the disciples, but He brought the actual Moses from heaven to stand upon the mount, in order that his presence there might be an abiding proof to all future generations that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt.xxii.32).

Again, Christ knew that some of His saints would never die, would never taste of death at all. Martha, in speaking of her brother Lazarus, said: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die" (John xi.24-26). Mark that! Perhaps you have not considered that portion, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die" - evidently referring in my opinion, to those saints of God that will be alive on the earth when Christ comes in clouds of glory (Rev.i.7). They will not die; they will be changed. The change that will take place upon them will be equivalent to death, but they will not taste of death. Paul says: "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which

are asleep" (that is, we shall not go before, we shall not be caught up before them which are asleep). "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thess.iv.13-17). Therefore, in my opinion, Elijah was brought by God from heaven to stand upon the mount that he might represent those saints that will never die. Here we see the wisdom of God in letting Moses die and in taking Elijah to heaven without death - that Moses, when brought back to the mount, might fittingly represent all that portion of the redeemed family of God that should die before going to heaven; and that Elijah might represent those of the redeemed family of God that shall be alive and remain at the coming of the Lord and be changed and so go to heaven without dying.

And so we read: "Behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him. And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus" (Mark that!), "Master, it is good for us to be here" (verses 30-33). As I remarked before, there was such a pouring down of heavenly light, glory, comfort, and joy unspeakable into their souls, and their faith and confidence were so raised up in the truth and reality of Christ's Person as being the very Son of God - the very brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of the Father's Person (Heb.i.3) - that they had never before known such a time, such a rapturous experience, so much of heaven in their hearts. They had never before felt so certain that their Master was the Christ of God. And so Peter said, "Master, it is good for us to be here."

Besides, such a supernatural revelation of Christ as this - such a display of His glory as the God-Man - wonderfully fitted and prepared them for the great work to which, as the apostles of Christ, they were about to be called and to be sent out to accomplish. How this very revelation of Christ, this wonderful transfiguration on the mount, provided them with the mightiest of all weapons to contend for the truth of the gospel and to withstand all the heresies, the infidelity, the sophistry, cunning, and malice of men, and all the hellish thoughts and craft of the devil, that Christ knew would stand in their way (Jas.iv.7; II Pet.i.16-18; I John iv.1; II John 7)! He thus fitted them for their work, that they might go out as being armed with a greater amount of courage, and as having had the most demonstrable proof that it was possible for dust and ashes ever to receive from God. Christ, therefore,

saw fit to take them up into this mountain, there to throw off the veil for a moment, and to allow His glory to burst forth upon their spiritual vision. And, as He showed Himself to them in a way beyond what He had ever done before, the Holy Spirit, at the same time, by His mighty power, so suffered their very souls with the goodness, the love, and the glory of Christ that they cried out, "It is good for us to be here."

Now, then, lest the time should be gone before I make some spiritual use of this, I will, the Lord helping me, in the first place, make this spiritual use of it, by saying that we are just like the disciples. We (and, mark you, I am speaking of the children of God, the Lord's dear people) are men of "like passions" with those disciples (Jas.v.17); we have the same infirmities, the same fears, the same tempting devil; we are subject to the same heaviness, the same dullness, and all that possessed those disciples will possess us.

You have heard from the chapter that, when Moses and Elias spake of His decease, "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep" - heavy with sleep. And so it is with us spiritually. Christ is always the same - the same bright, glorious Sun - whether we see Him or not, whether we feel His blessed beams or not. He never changes, for He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Heb.xiii.8). And His gospel is always the same; His promises and His invitations are always the same; it is always the same "glorious gospel of the blessed God" (I Tim.i.11). We are sometimes under great spiritual heaviness - dark, blind, ignorant, unfeeling; and, if I speak from my own experience, there are times when I seem to know very little of divine realities. Do you know what that is? Well, when Christ and Moses and Elias spake of His decease, the disciples were heavy with sleep.

But what follows that? "And when they were awake." Who awakened them? The blessed Lord. He saw that they were taking very little notice of what was being said; there they were, heavy with sleep. The Lord awakened them. My dear friends, we must be spiritually awake to see the glory of Christ and the glory of the gospel. The Holy Ghost must awaken us. What I mean is this: He must inwardly move us, rouse us up from our dull, heavy state, make us spiritually minded and alive in our souls. Then we shall see something of the glory of Christ, of God's salvation, of God's righteousness; then we shall see something of the glory in having been called of God to be saved; and then we shall say with the disciples, "It is good for us to be here."

I have found it like that all through my life. And, when I am left to myself, the carnal mind works, darkness spreads itself over everything, there are the affections grovelling amidst earthly things; and one is saying right words from years of experience, from memory, but with very little access to God. Sometimes you may

be sitting in the house of God, as perhaps some have been sitting here this morning down to the present moment, and feeling nothing. "Well," you may say, "I do not see much in it; I wish you had taken another text." Yes; I am no stranger to those experiences.

We are dependent upon the Spirit. We greatly need to contend for the Holy Spirit. I feel that the Personality and the work of the Holy Spirit are not made prominent enough. We cannot take one step in religion - comply with the precepts of the word, and thus walk and live godly - without the Spirit. We may talk about the ministers preaching Christ, and the people hearing of Christ; but there will be no seeing the glory of Christ without the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit has been pleased to come down into my soul, and put His foot upon the cursed craft of enemies within - lust, corruptions, darkness, filthiness, unbelief, blasphemy, infidelity - when He has brought down those high things which exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, and testified of Christ in my heart, then I have seen something of the glory of Christ. This has sometimes taken place with me when I have stood in the pulpit, and when I have said: "What shall I do, as I have nothing now?" But God, in His infinite mercy, does come down in the hour of worship, makes the things of earth to recede, brings the things of heaven near, leads my soul into liberty, and helps me to feel that there is nothing else worth a thought compared with being right with God. And when you have a blessed time, either in hearing the Word or at home reading it - I do not ask you where the blessed time takes place, whether in the house of God or in your office or in the field - but wherever it takes place, according to the spirituality of the thing, you say, "It is good for me to be here." There is nothing like this: this exceeds human friendship, all fleshly delight, all the joys of the family, "all that earth calls good or great" (265). Then we can say: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (I John 1.3).

God has given to some of you sweet manifestations of His love, precious manifestations of Christ. Some of you can speak of blessed times that you have had in the course of your profession; I have no doubt that some of you can speak of greater things than others. But that is not now my point. What I say is this: whenever God has lifted upon your souls the light of His countenance, there has then been no cloud upon your mind; you have felt, "It is good for me to be here."

Now let us just pass on: "And let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Eliaz: not knowing what he said." As we mentioned before, there was a bursting forth of Christ's glory - I mean His glory as God-Man; because, when we speak about the divine glory, we must remember that the glory of Christ as God is as incommunicable as the glory of God the Father:

the glory of God falling upon a man would burn him up to a cinder in a moment. Therefore, I say, it was the glory of Christ as God-Man breaking forth and enveloping the spirits of those disciples, a wonderful foretaste of that "eternal weight of glory" which is in reserve for all God's people (II Cor.iv.17).

"While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud." You see, then, what followed upon that very blessed experience when Christ stood before them. That is just as it is with us in our experience—just how it has been with me throughout my whole pilgrimage. I have had some very blessed times. Only just a week or so ago, I was looking over some pages filled with notes which I put down during the time I was labouring here for about four months, and at the time I was passing through my great domestic trouble, when God took my dear, darling girl; when I was bruised under the flail of God's correcting rod; and when I was almost ready to curse the day that I was born a man into the world, and the day I ever became a parent. Yet the very next night God came down and completely delivered me, blessed my soul, and granted me a manifestation of Christ such as I have had on previous occasions, causing a heart-melting over that verse by Mr. Hart:

"Faith in the bleeding Lamb,
O what a gift is this!
Hope of salvation in His name,
How comfortable 'tis!" (792)

And then there was nothing but submission to God, falling into His hands, saying, "My blessed God, my dear God, nothing is wrong that Thou dost. Here I am; do just what Thou pleasest: take the girl if Thou pleasest; take the wife if Thou pleasest. Whatever Thou pleasest, it will be for Thy honour and glory and for my good; for Thou hast redeemed me, and I be soon beholding Thy face in glory." +

But a cloud quickly came, and I was worse than ever; the devil seemed determined to hurl his darts at me with more rage than ever, and I was brought to enter the cloud. Troubles, trials, temptations came; and we are the same weak creatures as were the disciples. We do not pass away from these blessed manifestations with any more faith in hand than we had before. We cannot go forth from these secret places of heavenly joy and consolation and challenge the powers of darkness in our own strength any more than we could do it before; but we have to come forth from the land of comfort and consolation learning the prophet's words: "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer.x.23).

Therefore just take notice of this: "And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him." What

+ There is a fuller account of this blessing in the G.S. of 1879. pp.18-21.

was that for? Why, to teach those disciples that they must not expect to stand always in the light of their Master's manifested favour; to teach them to trust in their Master; and to confirm them that this day He has given them a great manifestation of Himself, that He has poured His glory down into their souls. And so, when I get very dull through a cloud of trouble, or through a cloud of temptation - when I cannot see my way as I want to see it - well, then, it just comes to this with me: I think God helps me to bear it. We cannot do anything without the Lord's help. Well, this is God's word, and that will never be overthrown. The devil has tried what he can do. He has stirred up the malice of men in order, if possible, to prove that this is not God's word; and I say to myself (Lord, help me continually to say it): "This is the word of the living God; heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of this word shall ever pass unfulfilled; it shall all be accomplished" (Matt.xxiv.34,35). God is unchangeable (Mal.iii.6). God is immutable (Heb.vi.18). He says: "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain" (Isa.xlv.19)? Have I ever left one of My own dear people to perish (John x.28)? Have I ever let the devil get one of My sheep or lambs (Job.i.10)? Did I ever leave any of My children to sink into hell because of the blasphemies, filthiness, and sensual delights of their carnal hearts (Ezek.xxxvi.25)? Have I ever denied My word (Psa.lxxxix.34; I Pet.i.23)?

God, in all our times of darkness, trials, and afflictions, speaks to us by His word. The word comes - that is, our minds are taken to some portion of it - and we get a little hold of it, not always a particularly great application of it; it will be often more like "a still small voice" (I Kings xix.12). You will be at your wit's end (Psa.cvii.27), at the very end of the earth (Psa.lxi.2), sometimes wondering where you can be. What a character you are! Nothing but a hypocrite after all your profession (Job i.9; Zech.iii.1)! And you are afraid you will be lost. And then some word will come, and that word will help you, lift you up, give you a little access to the Lord in prayer. And what is that? It is the Lord speaking unto you out of the cloud, saying: "This is My beloved Son: hear Him."
