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WE WOULD SEE JESUS (John xii. 21)

THE GOSPEL of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, falls into two main divisions. The first extends from chapters i to xii. It forms a chronicle of the Lord's public ministry. Herein by word and sign He manifests His glory as Son of God and Son of Man, and makes known the saving nature of His mission from heaven to earth. The second division includes chapters xiii to xxi. In these exists a narration of His heart-to-heart conversations with His disciples before His Passion, followed by an eye-witness account of His apprehension, trial, and death, concluding with a thrilling statement of the incidents relative to His resurrection.

The twelfth chapter, markedly, makes an epilogue to the preceding eleven. Its succinct, profound, coherent style reflects peculiarly the literary constructive excellence of the fourth Gospel generally, and gives an admirable digest or summary of their teaching. Hence what has been said of John's record throughout can be affirmed of this chapter particularly. It is that "no composition in the whole compass of literature is a more powerful unity. There is not a wasted clause, nor one without significance from the first word in it to the last".¹ This is high praise, but it is true. Accordingly it requires to be studied as a concise integral unity. Then is it seen that its sole end is to exalt Jesus in the sublimity and glory of His grace and truth. Purposely it focuses the attention on Christ's Person and directs keen thought to His mighty drawing and stern repelling power. This enables the student to grasp the pertinent significance of its central exclamation, "We would see Jesus", as also the reason of its disturbing statement, "Jesus departed and did hide Himself from them".

The chapter first confronts us with a beautiful scene of Jesus foregathering with His friends at Bethany, and what the assembly betokens. Here light is thrown on the attractive picture of a Love Feast which they make for Him in the house of Simon, a former leper. How happily and fittingly, as the Son of Man, He appears among them as verily one of themselves, their own kith

¹ Marcus Dods.

and kin, a real member of an exulting circle in a sanctified home. The same Lord who weeps with them that weep at the tomb now rejoices with them that rejoice in the felicities of a fraternal reunion.

Their impulse in making the banquet is (1) to ascribe glory and honour to Jesus the Son of God who should come into the world; and (2) to celebrate His crowning miracle of recalling Lazarus from the grave. Martha naturally is the hostess. For these reasons she serves at it with overflowing gratitude and exceeding devotion, while her likeminded sister Mary, in accordance with a prearranged design, proceeds with the utmost reverence to anoint the head and feet of Jesus with a pound of very precious spikenard. The whole house, which already is redolent with the love they bear to Him, is now filled with the fragrant odour of the ointment. The anointing denotes not simply their homage and veneration but testifies unequivocally that they openly avow Him to be the Redeemer and King of Israel. Such is the confident strength of their faith, and such is their ardent desire to show their devotion to Him, that Mary stoops to wipe His sacred feet with the tresses of her hair. Nothing is too menial for them to express their adoration of His mercy, and nothing too exacting to extol the greatness of His love towards them. They discern that which the disciples as yet fail to do, that Jesus the Anointed and sealed of God must needs fulfil His vocation as the true Paschal Lamb and offer up Himself at the Passover season as a sacrifice to bear away the sin of the world—i.e. “the unity of the world’s sin, in respect of the unity of the race”. His death then and His resurrection on the third day, the day significant of new life, He has foretold. He will rise from the tomb to be the Saviour of men.

The character of His salvation the Love Feast itself portrays. At the Feast is seen Simon cleansed from leprosy, the recognised type of sin, and Lazarus, whom He loved and restored to life, reclining at table with the Son of Man who is about to die in order to be the resurrection and life of all who believe in His Name. Mary’s anointing anticipates the day of His burial. A carnal Judas asks, “Why this waste?” even as many now ask concerning Christ’s sacrifice, but Jesus commends her action with its spiritual motive. “Let her alone,” He says, “She hath wrought a good work on me. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, this also

that she hath done shall be told for a memorial of her " (Matt. xxvi. 10-14). Why? Because Mary knows the constituent elements of the Gospel are the forgiveness of sin and the bestowal of new life as all can see demonstrated in the cleansing of Simon, and the bestowal of new life to Lazarus. At the outpouring of the Spirit all will come to discern this clearly.

Christ's presence at Bethany, and the making of the feast, could not be hid. " Much people among the Jews therefore come seeking to see Jesus, and Lazarus also whom He raised from the dead." They conclude that since Jesus can perform such a prodigious miracle in conquering man's last enemy He verily is the expected Messiah. On the next day these jubilant visitors join with those who accompany Him on His way to the holy city. Other believers in the city, hearing of His coming, come forth to meet the procession waving palm branches of triumph and kingly victory, His pathway all carpeted with their garments and spring foliage hailing Him as King and Son of David. Then breaking forth into ecstatic acclamation they shout and sing " Hosanna: blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest " (Mark xi. 7-10). To these august titles He without demur acquiesces fully as His right. See Him riding meekly on a colt, the foal of an ass, as He comes, as written of Him by Zechariah the prophet: " Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion: behold thy King cometh: He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass, upon a colt the foal of an ass " (Zech. ix. 9). Most refreshing and cheering is their exuberant faith and enthusiasm to the spirit of the meek and heavenly Rider. If the morning stars sing together and the sons of God shout for joy when the foundations of the earth and the measures thereof are laid, infinitely is it becoming now for the sons of men to shout and sing the glories of Him who steadfastly goes forward to accomplish that grand central deed of redemption around which the whole creation moves. Were they to remain silent the very stones on the highway would immediately cry out on such an auspicious occasion, for all heaven is watching His onward march to the Cross.

Entering Jerusalem, He likewise becomes the observed of all observers. Extreme is the commotion. The inhabitants enquire " Who is this? " " Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth," comes the answer. But the Son of Man provides His own reply. It is not audible, it is visible. They see Him proceed directly into the

temple on the 10th Nisan, the day divinely appointed for the sealing and setting apart of the lamb for the great all-inclusive Passover sacrifice. They see Jesus the Lamb of God's own provision for the supreme sacrifice, even as it is written, "In the Mount of the Lord it shall be seen" (Gen. xxii. 14).

During the Passion week the soul of Jesus is further regaled and His fortitude strengthened by the visit of a company of pious Greeks. They have come to keep the Passover Festival, and with becoming propriety approach Philip, the disciple with a Grecian name, and say, "Sir, we would see Jesus." Philip informs Andrew and the two together tell Jesus. They desire an interview. Gladly Jesus accedes to their polite request. Has He not formerly affirmed, "Other sheep I have who are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice"? Now He sees in this company an earnest of the fulfilment of His word. They have come as the first-fruits of an inestimable number of future Gentile believers. And their visit He regards as divinely coinciding with His own coming to the Passover. It is a call to teach them that its substantive fulfilment is to be in His own Person.

It is worthy of note that at His birth wise men came from the East to worship the new-born King of the Jews. On seeing the holy child they brought out of their treasures by way of tribute to His Kingship gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. Now, at the close of His sojourn on earth, these devout Greeks of a western nation come with their treasures of faith, homage, and obeisance to revere Him who alone has the words of eternal life.

It is indeed through their hearing of His word and work that they have come. For faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God. In the temple this week their faith undoubtedly has been augmented by a direct hearing of His word. And they have seen His cleansing of the outer court, the set place in the temple for Gentile worship. Besides, they must have listened to His confuting and confounding of His Pharisaic and Sadducean enemies. Consequently they feel emboldened to crave an interview. As Nicodemus did, they also perceive that God is with Him. Thus are they sure too that He can convey to them spiritual truth vital for their soul's salvation. Jesus gives to them as to Nicodemus a revelation perfectly adapted to their need.

He informs such enquirers of the imminence of His hour and consequent glorification. He says, "The hour is come that the

Son of Man should be glorified". To their ears the saying is prophetic and in part enigmatic. For its perfect future interpretation, however, He encases this securely in a pithy parable. By this means any misapprehension is negatived, and comprehension assured. What they do not understand at present they will after He is glorified.

The parable is, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit". The meaning is that even as a wheat seed has within itself the germ of reproductive life and must die by being buried in the earth before it can germinate into a harvest reproduction of itself, even so must the Son of Man die and be buried so that He may rise again and reproduce His resurrection life, His eternal life, in as many as believe in His Name and come to Him.

This principle of fruitfulness applies similarly to his followers. It is the moral and spiritual law of life springing out of death, or self-abnegation in their service for Him and the Gospel. "He that *loveth* his life shall lose it, but he that *hateth* his life shall keep it unto life eternal." Mark records the same admonition at greater length. "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake the same shall save it" (viii. 34, 35). "If any man serve me him will my Father honour, and where I am there also shall my servant be."

Referring to His hour, Jesus exclaims: "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." The trouble is a foretaste of the overwhelming horror that overtook Him in Gethsemane.

Having made this solemn and momentous asseveration, He deliberately makes a *Selah* pause in order to let it sink deeply into their memories and be pondered over. "Naturally any serious presentation of truth asks for silence that it may be duly considered."¹ This implies that He came from above, a fact they must accept. Then designedly and signally He gives to the assembled multitude supreme authoritative proof of His asseveration. Raising His eyes heavenward, He prays aloud to God over all, "Father glorify Thy Name" ("Hallowed be Thy Name"). Immediately in response came there a Voice from Heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." The

¹ W. M. MacGregor.

origin and awesomeness of the Voice none could dispute. It means that God already had glorified His Name by His Son's earthly life and ministry, and will glorify it again in His coming vicarious and expiatory death, culminating in His resurrection.

To the Greeks the Voice simultaneously confirms that Jesus is both Son of God and Son of Man, and affirms the absolute necessity of His hour. To the Jews it recalls the prophetic formula, "Thus saith the Lord", which in no case could be disregarded. Unquestionably it demands credence and attention. Does it not also remind them of David's testimony, "I cried unto the Lord and He heard me out of His holy hill"? Jesus is David's greater Son.

Previously High Heaven twice over bore witness to the divine Sonship and Saviourship of Jesus in this manner. At the Jordan, after the Baptist cried, "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world", a corroborating Voice out of Heaven called: "This is my well-beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." On the Mount of Transfiguration the Voice repeated the same declaration with the added injunction "Hear ye Him". He was the Incarnate Word. They who heard Him heard the word of the Father. These with this Voice heard in the temple make a threefold attestation rendering unbelief in Jesus as God's heaven-sent Saviour to be utterly without excuse, and fearfully culpable.

Yes, Jesus rejoices in spirit to see these Greek enquirers. To Him it is a day of exaltation in preparation for a day of humiliation. Their presence betokens that the uttermost parts of the earth have been given to Him for a possession. The whole earth shall be filled with His glory—the glory of His grace and truth. In them "He sees the prelude of the Kingdom of God in transition from the Jew to the Gentile".¹ Have they not come, and are they not showing their allegiance at the very moment that His own nation officially are rejecting His claims, and plotting His murder?

So He hastens to enlighten them of the genesis of His glory of grace and truth. The revelation they receive follows intimately that given to Nicodemus. It will come by the lifting up of the Son of Man on the Cross, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. He says, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Of this

¹ Bengel.

the Voice from Heaven which was for their sakes is the admiration. It assures them of its reality, and the manner of death by which He will die. Thus He prepares them for it, and denotes its significance. Out from His death will spring the gift of eternal life which their souls desire.

The lessons to be drawn from the visit of these Greek proselytes to see Jesus require to be laid earnestly to heart. The first is that they were led to Him by a knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures which spoke of better things to come. The better things they heard in the words of Jesus, and saw them exemplified in His works. We hear and see the same in the Gospels and their appendages the Epistles. The Gospels particularly give us such life-like delineations of Christ's movements and acts of mercy among men that we see and hear Him as if He were actually visible before us in the flesh. Equally like His Bethany friends and escorting followers do we become enamoured with His beauty, and our hearts are ravished by His words of grace. We say with the officers who were sent to arrest Him and could not: "Never man spake like this Man."

The foreign missionary among his converts finds the reality of this. When the heathen read the Gospels, or hear them read, the effect often is sensational. The Figure of Jesus is so fascinating and His speech so entrancing that passionately they fall in love with Him. Here is a man, they assert, as Heaven intended he should be. Further, here is One who wields supernatural power, and whose compassion for the needy and the despairing is heart-melting. His prescience, His forgiveness, His offer of salvation, His promise of eternal life captivate their thought. Accordingly the prime factor in evangelisation is the use of the Scriptures. They alone beget a true knowledge of sin, satisfy the hunger of the soul, and draw men to Christ. Blessed is the man whose delight is in the word of the Lord. There is no hope for anyone who neglects the Bible. To disregard it is to fly in the face of Providence. "Man liveth not by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. iv. 4). "The words that I speak unto you," affirmed Jesus, "they are spirit and they are life" (John vi. 63).

The second lesson is that to establish the faith of the enquiring they require a genuine vision of the Cross in its Scriptural significance. The reading of the Bible apart from pastoral instruction can lead men to a definite knowledge of saving truth

as it is in Christ. Such cases are not uncommon. The majority of earnest readers, however, seek an audience of the missionary. Much needs unveiling. There are mysteries to be solved, terms to be defined, incidents explained, and passages elucidated. Questions abound. What made it necessary for Jesus to die, and die in that cruel and shameful manner? What is the meaning of the Passover? What must we do to obtain this promised eternal life? And if we become Christians shall we not incur the revenge of the malign spirits whom we have been appeasing? The missionary, glad of heart, now carefully expounds to them the why and wherefore of Christ's death. Then are their eyes opened to see Jesus in His glory. The sight, though exceedingly painful, is also superbly edifying and supremely comforting. It fully answers their questions. The chief answer is that it is solely by godly repentance and faith in Christ that they can be saved. Salvation is entirely a free gift: it is by grace alone. Since Christ has on man's behalf conquered death and hell He has broken the malign power of all the principalities of the dark occult world. No one therefore need fear. All power in heaven and on earth belongs to the Saviour.

The august spectacle of Jesus being set forth on Calvary's hill for the whole world to witness, as a propitiatory offering for its sin, that God might be just and the Justifier of all who believe in Jesus, begets two marvels, and it is difficult to express which is the greater. These are the everlasting peace and relief that now fill the soul, and the unceasing wonder of the wisdom and power of the Atonement. The wonder appears in the divine paradox of God's love and wrath, His goodness and severity, His mercy and judgment collaborating harmoniously in the exhibition of His holiness and righteousness the twin fundamental elements of salvation. This, as has well been said by an old divine, is the greatest of all the works of God. Indeed, it is, as has been said, the grand central event around which the whole creation revolves.

The beautiful Light and the bounteous Love herein form the drawing power of Christ. But this mighty attraction is never coercive; it has also an inverse side, as instanced in quibbling Pharisees and rationalistic Sadducees. Listen to Jesus pleadingly saying to them: "While ye have light, believe in the Light that ye may be the children of light." Yet the appeal falls on deaf ears. "Though He had done so many miracles before them,

yet they believed not on Him." Their progeny, like tares among the wheat, continue to exist. Carnal pleasures and lustly pursuits blind their eyes and harden their hearts. They resist the call for repentance, wantonly disregard His Word, and bypass the offer of free grace. From all such "Jesus departs, and hides Himself from them", *now as then*. They obtain no vision of His glory. To John, who loves his Lord with all the passion and intensity of his soul, this is the blackness of outer darkness. It is his version of Matthew's record of the fearful eight woes pronounced on these religious recalcitrants.

John mentions an intermediate class. Among the chief rulers are many who believe on Jesus but prefer to remain secret believers. From fear of Pharisaic criticism and open hostility they have not the courage of their convictions. Their light is hidden under a bushel. They love the praise of men more than the praise of God, a reprehensible position. Such forget the rare opportunity of bringing indescribable joy to the heart of the Lord by a self-sacrificing service to Him in a proclamation of the Gospel. In this manner all may make for Him a spiritual feast of love and gratitude even as the Bethany friends did, and obtain the Light of His Countenance. Any disinclination to render this witnessing service destroys the life one selfishly seeks to retain. It saps the moral strength, for with the heart man believes unto righteousness, but confession is made unto salvation. Saints overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.

The last seven verses of the chapter constitute Christ's supreme address of counsel and warning to friends and foes before His departure for ever from the temple. It brings to an end His public ministry and is an epitome, or abstract, of his former discourses interlaced as these were with His many mighty works of mercy, the express evidential signs of His Deity and Messiahship. One pays heed, therefore, to its precise utterance as the last will and testament of one facing immediate death with all the solemnity due to such an occasion.

In order to make it clearly heard and remembered He stands forward and cries aloud its exciting sentences. In so doing He follows the revered custom of an oriental town-crier who by his clarion call hushes the din of the populace and arouses united attention to an official proclamation of urgent importance. Twice previously in the temple He has thus made momentous announcements. John vii. 28: "Then cried Jesus in the temple, Ye both

know Me, and ye know whence I am; and I am not come of myself, but He that sent me is true, whom ye know not." John vii. 37: "In the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

This third cry, the sum of His "I am" temple intimations, pertains (1) to His relationship with the Father; they are essentially one in word and in deed; and (2) to the weal or woe resulting from belief or unbelief in Jesus and His sayings. "He is the Executive of the Father's will. What is done potentially in the purpose of God is done in fact by His Son." Hence they that believe on Jesus believe also on the Father who sent Him; and they who behold the Son behold also the Father.

To support this revelation of Himself He states the pre-determined purpose of His coming into the world: "I am come Light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness." Light has here a comprehensive sense. He comes not as a light, but as the Light of Life. In John's Gospel Light is associated intimately with its relatives, Word, Life, Love, Truth. All these, like Old Testament doctrinal terms, shade closely and inseparably into each other. Throughout the first twelve chapters Light is mentioned twenty-one times; and Truth twenty-two times, and Life thirty-four times in the whole Gospel. These terms are not mere abstractions but have their investment and emanation in Jesus Christ. They are centred in Him. We see, therefore, in Jesus, the shining of the divine glory, which He was ever struggling to manifest forth. Men behold in Him the Light of the Divine Countenance, the Shekinah Light, which shines above the Mercy Seat covering the Ark containing the Law, or Ten Words of the Divine Covenant of salvation. Just as nothing is more joyous, darkness-dispelling, illuminating, self-evidencing, and so absolutely indispensable to life as natural light, even so is this spiritual Light for the salvation of mankind, of which Jesus is the Embodiment. The disciples, the Greeks, and His Hosanna-singing followers will understand this after He is lifted up and glorified. The Holy Spirit will reveal then the things concerning Him to all believers.

John's Gospel with punctilious care emphasises the way of life. Jesus in His farewell call reiterates the same care. Summarily it is to know Him, whom to know is life eternal. To know

Him is to see Him. To see Him is to listen to His Voice, His Word, and thereby not only to believe on Him but come to Him and receive Him. For as many as receive Him, to them gives He power to become the sons of God, the children of Light. He Himself is the way, the truth and the life.

To act contrariwise means condemnation, because the Word which unbelievers despise and reject will at the last day be their Judge. The ground reason for this Jesus states explicitly to His disciples: "If I had not come and spoken unto them they had not sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth Me, hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works [the signs] which none other man did, they had not had sin, but now have they both seen and hated both Me and my Father . . . without a cause" (John xv. 22-5; cf. John iii. 19). "The same Word which seals the soul's salvation of believers will seal the condemnation of those who despise it."

Throughout this address of Jesus breathes His solicitous concern for the souls of men. With what meekness He admonishes the obstinate and unruly, and with what tenderness He seeks their conversion! His parting cry is a restatement that the commandment of the Father included the gift of eternal life to whosoever believes in the Name of His Son.

The contrast which this summary chapter presents between the children of light in the intensity of their love and allegiance as followers of the Lord, and the bitterness of the hatred and unrelenting animosity of the children of darkness to the Light of the world is singularly striking. Whereas the former anoint Jesus with their faith and adoration in response to His anointing from on high, and thereby behold the shining glory of His Countenance, the latter contrariwise set themselves and take counsel together to cast away His words from them, the sequel of which is the loss of the heavenly vision, for moral perversity inevitably produces spiritual blindness. Their procedure illustrates the truth of the ancient adage that "evil shall slay the wicked, and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate".

In the contrast drawn looms prominently the subject of human responsibility. It is made absolutely plain. No room is left for speculation on the point. God never entirely leaves the children of darkness to themselves. His call is ever, "Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will ye die?" The word of revelation, exemplified in the lives of the godly, pursues and warns them to

the end. Did not Jesus strive with Judas to the last, even to the washing of his feet, and the passing to him of the sop, or dainty morsel of the meal as incentives against his contemplated treachery? Preachers in the proclamation of the Gospel require to take serious note of this. It should always be accompanied by a strong warning against infamy and a moving plea for repentance. For God cannot be mocked. He is Light and in Him is no darkness at all. Whatsoever the obstinately unrepentant and faithless sow, that shall they also reap.

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