

THE WORD MADE FLESH

by: Robert Murray McCheyne — 1813-1843

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father) full of grace and truth — John 1: 14.

YOU REMEMBER, BRETHREN, WHEN Philip went down to Samaria, it is said that he preached Christ unto them, and there was great joy in that city (Acts 8:5, 8). You remember that the apostle Paul says, 'I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Corinthians 2:2). Now, brethren, it is really the case that the only object in the world that can give peace to your soul is 'Christ, and him crucified'.

Those of you who are not awakened are in a great mistake in this matter; you think you have to find out something good in yourselves; you little know, dear friends, that you are seeking rest in the creature, which if you could find it, you would make out that Christ has died in vain. It is for this reason that I have chosen this text tonight, though it is so deep and full that I approach it with fear and trembling; yet certain am I that if anything will give you peace it is the getting a sight of his glory, 'the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'. It is just beholding his glory.

The first truth that is laid open here is the humiliation of the Son of God. It is laid down to us in two parts. First, 'The Word was made flesh.' Second, 'He dwelt among us.'

1. The humiliation of the Son of God consisted in his being made flesh.

I do not stop to inquire why he is called 'the Word'. I would just remark that as the word of a man expresses the mind of a man, so Christ was revealed that he might express the mind of God.

Let us consider what is meant in his being made flesh.

It is not meant that he really took a body without a soul. We know that Christ, as he dwelt among us, had not only a body, but a soul - a loving, human soul: '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' — John 12:27).

Now, brethren, I do not so much insist upon the word 'soul', as upon 'what shall I say?'. Ah, this expresses the tenderness of a human soul. Speaking with reverence, I would say, there seems to be a holy perplexity in his mind: 'Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death' — Matthew 26:38). And then the next verse shows he had a human will: 'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt! From these passages, it is obvious that when it is said, 'The Word was made flesh', it is not meant that the Godhead was united to a human body without a soul.

Again, you are not to understand that it was a sinful body. The word 'flesh' is often used in this sense, thus: '... the flesh lusteth against the Spirit' — Galatians 5:17. Some have thought so, but it has not always this meaning; thus, in Ezekiel 36:26 it is said, 'I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.'

And, again, we know quite well from the Word of God that Christ was holy. The angels said at his birth: 'That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of

God' — Luke 1:35. And we know that in his manhood he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners — Hebrews 7:26. And we are expressly told that the one thing in which he differed was that he was without sin — Hebrews 4:15. And we are told that in dying, 'He offered himself without spot to God' — Hebrews 9:14. Now, we know that it was his human soul and body he offered up to God. So it is true that his humanity was holy.

I come now to the real meaning of the words — that he who was the second Person in the Godhead, became one with a holy human soul, and with a body with our infirmities, such as thirst, pain, capable of tears, weariness, suffering etc., for so much is implied in the word 'flesh'. 'All flesh is grass.' This is spoken of our feebleness. 'The Word was made flesh.' Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. Perhaps some of you may ask why God was manifest in the flesh. There were three great reasons.

The first was that he might obey the law of God in the same nature that had broken the law. When the devil had got man to trample the law beneath his feet, as if it had never been, he thought that the law would never lift its head again. Now, the Word was made flesh that he might obey it; and so it is said, 'God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law' — Galatians 4:4,5. I remember explaining this once before to you. First, that he was made under the law that he might obey it. And then, he was made under the curse of the law that he might endure it. Now, it is to the first of these that I now speak, namely, that Christ might obey the law, and do more honour to it, than if it had never been broken. This was one of the great reasons why he became flesh. If it had not been for this he might have visited the earth for an hour. But the reason why he had to stop so long was to show that it was a good law.

You know, brethren, if you look across the world, and if you take God's holy law and shed the light of it over the world, there is something overpowering to think how fearfully his law has been broken; think of all the Sabbath-breaking there is in the world, and all the thefts, swearing, adultery, etc., all of these streaming over the world, and blotting out, as it were, the law. And oh, brethren, it is sweet to think it was worth the condescension of the Godhead becoming flesh to obey the law, so as to show to men and angels and devils that God's law was so much more honoured, than if it had never been broken.

The second reason why the Word was made flesh was that he might die — that he might bear the curse of the law:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man — Hebrews 2:9.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil — Hebrews 2:14.

In these two verses it is distinctly said that the Word was made flesh in order that he might die. You know, brethren, if he had remained in the bosom of the Father he could not have suffered — for the divine nature cannot suffer; but in order that he might die he must be made flesh. The reason why he took upon him a body was that he might bear the curse. You know we are under the curse; now, Christ took upon him flesh, that he might bear the curse.

I would just mention the third reason why he was made flesh. It is that he might have sympathy for men.

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God — Hebrews 2:17.

Brethren, there are no persons that can have compassion as those who have felt like us. You know God said to the Jews, You shall be kind to strangers: 'for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt' (Exodus 23:9). So God says to Christ, 'You know the heart of a man.' This was one reason why he was made flesh. Those of you who are afflicted believers, you know what it is to have a friend that was tried in all points like as you are.

2. I come now to the other part of his humiliation, 'He dwelt among us'. In the Greek it is, 'he tabernacled among us, as in a tent.'

It is believed by divines that there is here an allusion to the tabernacle in the wilderness. And just as the tabernacle was the meeting place with God, so Christ is the meeting place between a sinner and God.

But further, it implies his going from place to place. You know this was the case with the tabernacle; so this was one of the parts of the humiliation of Christ. He was not only born, but born in a low condition, and his life was one of poverty. Why did he this? One reason was that he might sanctify affliction. Some say, 'I have not clothes to come to the church with. My brethren, do you not know that Christ had not where to lay his head? Ah, my brethren, this is one reason why he dwelt among us as in a tent. Away with your excuses that you cannot come to the church because you have no clothes; Christ was poor, though he might have chosen a palace. But here we see the glory that burst through his humiliation.

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Some may perhaps ask, 'When he became flesh, did he cease to be God?' No, he did not. Then did he entirely veil his glory? No. 'Then did all see it?' Oh, no, 'We beheld it.' True, his glory was seen by some that did not believe on him. When angels saw his glory, you remember there was a star that appeared at his birth - outward, carnal eyes could see that star. And you remember as he sat in the temple disputing with the doctors, they were astonished at his words - all the world could see that glory. And you remember at the marriage of Cana of Galilee, he made the water into wine — outward, carnal eyes could see that. So with all his miracles. But this is not the glory spoken of here; at least it is not all the glory. What is this glory then? I answer, it was the glory of the divine perfections: divine wisdom, divine love, etc.

There was the glory of the divine wisdom shining through him. Who could see it, but those whose eyes were open? Brethren, in all that he did he was bearing the sufferings of many. And oh, brethren, have you seen this glory? For this is the glory of the only begotten of the Father. Have you seen this glory? For this was the glory that shone through the Word made flesh. It was not only the star; it was not only the wisdom he showed in the temple; it was not only the miracles; it was not these so much as the plan of redemption — the scheme he accomplished, when he said, 'It is finished.' It was that that showed his wisdom.

There was the love of the only begotten of the Father. His very appearance in the manger at Bethlehem showed the love of the only begotten of the Father. Have you seen that love?

I would now begin to ask you the question: Have you beheld that glory? John says, 'We beheld it.' The first moment that a sinner is brought to peace is when he beholds a divine person bearing the curse due to him for sin. Then the soul says, 'Here will I rest.' Have you seen that glory? I know you cannot see it till your eyes are anointed.

3. Last of all, the provision found in Christ: 'Full of grace and truth'

Perhaps some here are saying, If Christ is so glorious, I cannot come to him. I can only say, with Peter, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). If it is true

that all the perfections that dwell in the Father dwell in Christ, then I cannot come to him — How can I come to him?" There is but one answer to that: 'He is full of grace and truth.'

I do not know if I can make it plainer; but the meaning is just this, that he is full of grace — grace for those that deserve wrath. Once he sat in Levi's house with publicans and sinners — how could they sit beside him? Ah! the reason was, 'He was full of grace! Brethren, I think I could say that you could not imagine a more suitable Saviour than he is.

And then he is full of truth. 'The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ' — John 1: 17. The law was a shadow, Christ is the substance. All that is in Christ is truth. The pardon he gives is true pardon. The peace he gives is true peace. Brethren, will you come to him?

I would now invite all heavy laden sinners to come to him; and I would give you two reasons why you should come. First, he is full of grace. Second, he is full of truth. My brethren, you need a divine Saviour, and yet you need one full of grace. Brethren, what Saviour can you imagine to yourself if Christ does not do? How graciously does he invite you to come.

Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price — Isaiah 55: 1.

And if you will not come, then he comes to you and says:

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me — Revelation 3:20.

How full of grace he must have been who said, 'Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of man' — Proverbs 8:4.

Consider how long you have lived without him, trampled on his blood, despised his invitations, and yet he has waited all that time.

Consider how long you have provoked him since you were awakened, making him a liar by not believing his Word. Consider how long he has stood.

Brethren, he is full of grace, though he is full of glory. Will you not let him save you? Is it much he asks of you? Will you not allow him to justify you? Ah, brethren, if you do reject so gracious a Saviour, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation' — Hebrews 2:3. Surely, brethren, an eternity in hell will not be too much for those who despise the blood of Christ.

I beseech you, brethren, that you receive not the grace of God in vain. You do not know the guilt of that man who will go away tonight despising Christ. You do not know the guilt and danger of despising him who is so able, as well as so loving a Saviour. Amen.

Taken from "A Basket of Fragments"-Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne

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