

8. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

NEVER knew my mother," said Henry Ward Beecher. "She died when I was three years old. But one day in after years, turning over a pile of old letters in my father's study, I found a package of her letters to him, beginning with her first acquaintance with him, and coming down into her married life; and as I read those pages, at last I knew my mother. I remember that there was one letter in which she first spoke freely and frankly of her love. That to me is like the Gospel of John. It is God's love letter to the world."

In the Gospel of John especially God unfolds His love to us in the eternal gift of His Son, who was the Word of God revealed in human life, for "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. Amazing and unfathomable love!

But the same message is apparent throughout the Bible. In word and act and life Jesus was the living Scripture. By His life He revealed what the Holy Scriptures had been saying for hundreds of years. Mary Lathbury put this thought into the beautiful words of her hymn:

"Break Thou the bread of life,
Dear Lord, to me,
As Thou did break the loaves Beside the sea;

Beyond the sacred page
I seek Thee, Lord;
My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word! "

We ask the question, What did He who was the living Word say about the Written Word? What did Jesus say about the Holy Scripture? In conflict with His enemies, our Savior, quoting from the Old Testament in defense of His assumption of the divine title the Son of God, plainly stated that "the scripture cannot be broken." John 10:35. This is His clear statement. Being the expressed will of the unchangeable God, the Word of God is also unchangeable. The word scriptures simply means "writings"; Holy Scriptures, the "holy writings."

Jesus, as He quoted from the Bible of His time which is our Old Testament-declared that nothing could break it; nothing could make it fail in the fulfillment of its prophecies, its declarations of divine truth, its record of inspired histories. Would it not be well for all of us to agree with Him? Many have tried to break the Bible, but so far they have not succeeded. According to the inspired word of Christ, they will never succeed. Our Savior depended upon the Holy Scripture and proclaimed it immutable. Why should not we?

As we read the Four Gospels we see clearly that the subject of Christ's teaching and preaching was the Word of God. He met questioners with: "It is written What says the scriptures?" "How reads thou?" He who was the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), pointed to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, saying, "They are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

Turning to the New Testament we have in the Four Gospels the life and work of our Savior as it actually occurred in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. It was "the Spirit of Christ which was in them" which "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." 1 Peter 1: 11. The Acts of the Apostles describes the work and success of the early preachers of Christian faith. Then follow the Epistles and the rest of the New Testament, including Revelation, which is definitely said to be "the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass." (Revelation 1: 1.) Therefore, the entire Bible-Old and New Testaments together-is a Christian Book. It is a testimony to Jesus and the testimony of Jesus, given by inspiration.

It is recorded in the Book of Acts that when the Christian evangelist Philip heard a certain traveler reading the Holy Scripture, he recognized the words of the book of the prophet Isaiah and asked, "Understand thou what thou reads?" Acts 8:30. The stranger replied, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" Verse 31. This guidance was given, as we read in verse thirty-five: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." By explaining the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly work of Christ as prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled before living witnesses, early New Testament preachers proclaimed the gospel.

Someone has truthfully said that the New Testament is hid in the Old, and the Old Testament is

revealed in the New. It is by searching both Testaments together that we become informed regarding God's plan for man's salvation. Without the Old Testament the claims of our Savior to be the Messiah, or Christ, of prophecy cannot be substantiated. The New Testament gives the history and teachings of Jesus Christ and shows Him to be the holy and pure Messiah, the Son of God; but if the Old Testament had not predicted what the Messiah would be and do, there would have been no standard by which to decide whether or not this Holy Being had appeared among men.

Again and again and again Jesus quoted Holy Scripture as authority for His acts, as predictions of His birth, His work, His sufferings, His resurrection, His victory over death. In quoting from the Scriptures, He recognized them as of divine authority. We should do the same.

Matthew 4: 1-11 records our Savior's threefold temptation at the hands of the devil. First, He was tempted to perform a miracle to satisfy His human hunger after a forty-day fast. "If thou be the Son of God," suggested the evil one, "command that these stones be made bread." Verse 3. The answer was, "It is written." The Scripture was from Deuteronomy 8:3. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" Matthew 4:4.

Next, on a pinnacle of the temple the tempter said, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written [and here the devil himself quotes Scripture from Psalm 91:11, 12, but he quotes it imperfectly and partially, as follows), He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Matthew 4:6. Again Jesus countered with the Scripture, this time from Deuteronomy 6:16. "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Matthew 4:7. Here he assumed the title of God, which belongs to Him.

In the third and last temptation Jesus was taken into an exceeding high mountain where He saw all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them in a moment of time the world's first moving picture. The words of temptation were: "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Matthew 4:9. Our Savior's answer was again a quotation of Scripture, this time Deuteronomy 6:13. "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shall thou serve. Then the devil leaves him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him." Matthew 4: 10, 11.

Christ's use of Holy Scripture in time of temptation is a lesson for us, a warning to us, and a promise to us. It is a lesson because it shows us how to meet temptation. It is a warning because so many of us fail to meet the temptation successfully. It is a promise because the record shows us how temptation can be met successfully. The only weapon with which we can successfully conquer Satan is the Written Word of God, "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17), "able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

With these three mighty sword thrusts, our Savior put the evil one to flight. This shows the great and supremely important necessity of reading the Word of God -yes, of studying it, absorbing it, until it has a place in our hearts and is ever available in times of need and temptation. Like our Savior, we must be able to say, "It is written; it is written; it is written." Let us read the Holy Scriptures more that we may be familiar with them. Was it not Cardinal Newman who said, "I read my Bible to know what people ought to do, and my newspaper to know what they are doing"?

The Holy Bible is like a telescope: If a man looks through his telescope, he sees worlds beyond; if he looks at his telescope, he sees nothing but it. Similarly the Bible must be looked through to see what is beyond. Too many people merely look at the Bible; therefore they see only the dead letter of it and not the glorious truth which it reveals.

God Himself is called the "God of truth" three times in the Old Testament. (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 31:5; Jeremiah 10: 10, margin.) And for His disciples Jesus prayed to His Father, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." John 17:17. Christ Himself was the living Word, and therefore He could say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), for the Word of God was lived in His life before the world. Christ, the Son of God, abides forever. (John 8:35; 12:34.) So also His Word shall never pass away. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Matthew 24:35. The gospel prophet Isaiah-who more than any other prophet of the Old Testament foresaw, foreshadowed, and declared before the glory of Christ said, "The grass withers, the flower fades: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." Isaiah 40:8.

The skeptic Voltaire declared that the Bible was an exploded book. Now, more than a century and a half after his death, the Scriptures are circulated more widely than ever. When he expressed his doubts and made his attack upon the inspiration of the Bible, it was translated in only a dozen or so languages. Today, in whole or in part, God's Word may be read in over a thousand languages. Not the Bible, but Voltaire's theory has been exploded. Robert Ingersoll once declared that the Bible would not be read after

ten years. He has now been dead for over half a century, but the Scripture lives on.

The Bible continues or for one reason: Christ's words are life because He is life. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." John 1:4. He personally is called the "Word of life." (1 John 1: 1.) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1A. In Revelation 19:13 also He is called "The Word of God." He was "the Word . . . made flesh" (John 1: 14), who came and dwelt among us and revealed to us the reality of the Holy Word. Jesus said that He Himself was the "bread of life: he that comes to me shall never hunger; and he that believes on me shall never thirst." John 6:35.

Then what does He suggest that we should do? Listen to His words in verses fifty-seven and fifty-eight: "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eats me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eats of this bread shall live for ever." Jesus was not speaking here of His literal flesh, but of His teaching, His Word. "It is the spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Verse 63. Therefore, to eat the flesh of the Son of God is to live by His words. Someone has beautifully said, "He who by faith receives the Word is receiving the very life and character of God."

So when we say, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11), we should be praying not only for physical nourishment but for spiritual food. It is also clear that if we would really know the words of Christ, we must be willing to obey His Word, which is the Word of God. If any man will do his will," He said, "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." John 7:17. We think, too, of the close relationship to Christ which is the privilege of those who are obedient to the Word of God. Jesus said, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it." Luke 8: 2 1.

The Word of God is like seed which falls into the earth, and that which falls into an honest heart will bring forth fruit unto everlasting life. This Jesus declared in His parable of the sower. (Luke 8:5-15.) He referred those who were seeking truth to the Written Word. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked the conditions of eternal life, He directed his attention to the Scriptures: "He said unto him, What is written in the law? how reads thou?" Luke 10:26.

Likewise, if we wish to know the way of eternal life today, we can find it in the Word of God. Jesus said that those who do not know the Scriptures are in error. Here are His exact words: "You do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." Matthew 22:29. He also pronounced a blessing upon those who hear the Word of God and obey it. "He said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Luke 11: 2 8. Is that blessing ours? It may be if we are willing to hear the Scripture and obey it. Jesus said that those who do not obey God do not have His Word abiding in them. (John 5:38.) And He also declared that the Word of God is the agency which cleanses the human heart. "Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." John 15:3.

Let us always remember that the Word of God is seed. Jesus said so. "The seed is the word of God." Luke 8: 11. And that seed will grow and grow and bring its full fruition in our lives and in the world if we do not destroy it by disobedience and doubt. As the apostle said, it will effectually work in those who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13.) No wonder our Savior's disciples said what they did about the Scripture! For instance, the Apostle Peter said, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2 Peter 1:21. No wonder the Apostle Paul declared, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"! 2 Timothy 3:16.

And here is something important: Even after His resurrection from the dead, Jesus still quoted Scripture to His disciples and explained its meaning to them. Read the beautiful story of His appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus on the day of His resurrection. They were discouraged and sad because they thought He was still in the tomb. And then He said to them, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" Luke 24:25, 26. According to our Savior, one is very foolish who does not accept and believe all the Holy Scriptures. The disciples had misunderstood or neglected the Scriptures, so "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Verse 27. Jesus appealed to the Holy Scriptures to explain the very events that had so disheartened and discouraged His followers. All these things, including His death, had been predicted in the Scriptures, and when they took place the disciples should have found great courage and joy in their fulfillment. This they did a short time later when they said, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he

opened to us the scriptures?" Verse 32.

Of the Scriptures Jesus Himself said, "[They] cannot be broken." John 10:35. Heaven and earth will pass away before one letter or even a corner of a letter of God's Word will pass away. That is what Jesus said about the Scriptures. We dare not reject or neglect them. We must receive them, believe them, trust them, quote them, as did He who was and is the living Word.

"O Word of God Incarnate,
O Wisdom from on high,
O Truth unchanged, unchanging,
O Light of our dark sky,

We praise Thee for the radiance
That from the hallowed page,
A lantern to our footsteps,
Shines on from age to age."
-W. W. How.