

VI

THE FAITH OF ENOCH

SCRIPTURE LESSON: GENESIS V.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God translated him; for before his translation he had witness borne to him, that he had been well-pleasing unto God, and without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him."—HEBREWS XI. 5, 6.

That is the New Testament commentary on and the interpretation of an Old Testament story.

"Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."—GENESIS V. 24.

THE New Testament statement may thus be paraphrased: By faith Enoch pleased God, and therefore God translated him that he should not see death.

The Old Testament story is characterized by direct simplicity, and we will consider it as revealing the victory of faith in the man Enoch. The Old Testament writer simply says that Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. The New Testament writer goes behind the statement of the actual walk of the man, and tells us his secret, so that we may understand the story.

The chapter in which it occurs is a remarkable record, stretching over human history for fifteen hundred years. It is a very commonplace story. Birth and burial, passion and pain, living and dying. The whole chapter gives the lie to the devil's lie in its solemn march. In the hour of temptation, to which humanity

had yielded, he had said: "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" The answer given by the woman was not accurate. We are almost sure to go wrong at the beginning if we parley with the devil. She said: "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat." That was correct. "But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it." God had said nothing of the kind. It is a habit to add something to the commandment of God, and then object to it. God had said: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Satan said: "Ye shall not surely die." We turn over then to this fifth chapter, and through it we hear a tolling of the knell of death, "And he died . . . and he died . . . and he died." So history moves on; and the lie of hell was contradicted in the process of the history.

Only once across the fifteen hundred years the bell did not toll. There was no booming of the bell of death. Once the recorder had to change his phrasing, and instead of telling the story of a man who lived and died, he told of a man who lived; but when he came to record the end of his life, he could not add "and he died." He had to say, "He was not, for God took him." Upon that piece of history from the Old Testament there flashes the light of the New Testament declaration, as we are told, "By faith he was translated," because he had pleased God. In that he was pleasing to God, "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him." We ask why is it that for once in the long and monotonous process of history of burial upon burial a man is said to have been translated. The

answer is self-evident; it was because he walked with God.

That brief story of Enoch is wonderful. A change came over the manner of his life. We are told he lived for 65 years, and begat Methuselah. After the birth of the boy a change came, and from then to the end of his life it could not be said of him in the ordinary phrasing, that he lived. After he begat Methuselah he walked with God for 300 years. It is a fascinating story. How the change came about we are not told. It has been surmised that there came to him some revelation, given in the life of many a man after the birth of his child. It may be that he then saw the darkness of the surrounding ages, and looked on, and understood the divine movement, and so began to live by walking with God.

Now the story of that life and its consummation is told in suggestive phrases. To these I would ask your attention; first, that Enoch walked with God; secondly, he was not, because God took him.

We begin with the simple statement concerning his life: "He walked with God." The Bible is characterized by the glory and brevity of many of its biographies. Take David, for instance. It is a wonderful story in the historical section of the Old Testament; but in the New Testament we have the whole story summarized. "David, after he had in his own generation served the counsel of God, fell on sleep." That is a brief and full biography. Or to come to the biography of Saul: "I have played the fool." That is his story from first to last. But in all these biographical sketches none is

more eloquent or more simply suggestive than this: "He walked with God."

What does it mean? What does it mean when we say we walk with anyone? We all know. What does walking mean? I will suggest four things of the simplest nature, and they apply perfectly to this story, and to this revelation of what life means when it is lived by faith. If a man walks with God, it means, first, he moves in the divine direction. Secondly, it means he is in agreement with God. Thirdly, it means there is mutual trust. Here a man trusted God, and God trusted him. Finally, if a man walk with God, it means that he keeps step with God.

Let us test these simple things. You were going home, and walked with someone. What does that mean? You went the same way, and if you were in agreement, there was no controversy between you. Therefore you trusted each other, and you kept step. Oh, I have walked with people who did not think it mattered if they were in step with me or not. They were making a great mistake. To one who loves music, the perfection of walking means rhythm, keeping in step, one step at a time.

Enoch walked with God, and that means he moved under the divine direction. We are at once face to face with a question which will inevitably arise. In what sense can we speak of God as going anywhere? How can God decide the walk? A simple outlook upon all the history of humanity will at least bear me out when I say that nothing yet has reached finality. It is true of the whole creation of God, and of all human history.

Everything is in a state of transition. As Tennyson has put it:

“Through the ages,
One increasing purpose runs.”

But it runs; nothing is final and settled. With profound reverence, and yet with assurance, I declare that this is true about God, not about Himself, His own Being, but about His relation to His creation; and in His relation to humanity, and to human history. Everything is moving, in a state of transition, and God is moving in these things. Nothing is final. Nothing is complete.

What has been the line of the divine going in human history? His going is that of uncompromising, unceasing, and unabating hostility to sin. That is the result of what God is in essence. The deepest fact concerning His Being is that He is love. That creates His unswerving hostility to sin in every form, because sin mars and ruins and blights and blasts His humanity. Whether we take the history of this Book, or go outside it, wherever we look, God is marching to war, a war with sin. He is out on a great campaign, and His campaign is fighting evil in every form. This is the necessity of the love of His heart.

In the thirty-third chapter of Isaiah the question is asked: “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” The presence of God is everywhere, and at all times, in all human history; it is devouring and blasting. It is an everlasting burning. The prophet asked the question: Who can dwell and live there? The answer

is: “He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from looking upon evil.” God’s fire is forever burning in wrath against evil, because evil blinds and blights and blasts humanity.

Enoch walked with God. From the moment of the birth of his child he did not live an ordinary life. His life was different, marked out from the ordinary life of the men and women surrounding him. He was marching with God in hostility to evil. He walked with God by faith.

But there is a deeper note. This means there was perfect agreement. That is not always included in walking with God. Some people who are in agreement with the general principle about God’s purpose, and desire and action, are nevertheless not at peace with Him within their own lives. Agreement means the end of controversy, that a man shall not for a single moment oppose his will or opinion to the will of his God. Many people perceive the great divine movement, and agree with it, even go so far as to utter its praise, and yet by some small controversy they are not in agreement with God, and are walking with God with their faces set toward the light, agreeing with His purpose. To make a modern application of this: There are many who praise and exult in the Sermon on the Mount, but they are not living by it. They agree that the divine direction is the true one, but they are not walking with God, because there is still remaining a controversy between God and themselves. Whereas they may even be fol-

lowers, they are not with Him. Enoch walked with God for 300 years. There was no controversy; and he was bound in all his life with the purpose, the passion, and the power of God. He walked with God.

That leads to mutual trust. To me that is a very arresting thought. Enoch trusted God about himself, as to all the ultimate issue of human history and human life. He trusted Him. That is why he walked with Him.

It is equally true that God trusted Enoch. God is speaking to another man, Abraham: "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do . . . for I have known him." Enoch trusted Him. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." What a marvellous declaration is made concerning Moses, which stands in terrible contrast to the next sentence:

"He made known his ways unto Moses,
His acts unto the children of Israel."

The children of Israel had to wait and see what He did. Moses was told beforehand. Because He trusted him, He could not hide His purpose, and talked with him face to face. And He trusted Enoch for 300 years. They moved in the same direction, in perfect agreement, trusting each other.

We come to perhaps the simplest, and yet the most acid test. For 300 years Enoch kept step with God, which simply means that he did not run before God, nor lag behind. Those are two things we are all so apt to do. How often zeal outruns knowledge, and we rush ahead with calamitous results. Then at other times zeal is absent, though knowledge is there, because the

command puzzles us, and we lag behind. That is not perfect walking with God.

The supreme illustration of this point is that of Peter. In the dark night of betrayal, in the Garden, he ran ahead of his Lord, and drew his sword, and struck off Malchus' ear. That is zeal without knowledge. He was running ahead. He was not waiting for commands. He was not obedient to the will of his Lord. With fine heroism, as it appeared, he struck a blow, and the result was a poor business, for he only knocked off a man's ear! He might have struck off his head, not his ear. But zeal without knowledge met with a sharp rebuke: "Put up the sword into the sheath," "for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." From that moment Peter was offended, he felt he had been snubbed. Then what happened? He dropped behind, and followed afar off, and that lagging left him inside the gates, there by the fire with the enemies of Christ. First, heroic zeal! Now he is cursing and swearing, and insisting that he never knew Him! Running ahead, lagging behind! That is not walking with God. Walking with God is keeping step with God. The man who walks with God will not undertake any business until he knows the will of God. As James has put it: "Ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this or that." We used to say, God willing, but that is now out of date.

The other peril is that of lagging behind when He commands the movement. We may run away, listening to the siren voices, and allow them to gain the victory; and we are left behind, until, perchance, we find ourselves getting warmth from the cold of the night at the

fire of His enemies, and we shall say we never knew Him.

A man who walks with God will not run ahead or lag behind, but will keep step all the way. That is possible by faith, and faith only. There is no finer ideal of life than this. It may be objected that we are far advanced from the day of Enoch; that he lived in primitive times, not characterized by our complex age; that it was a much simpler thing to walk with God then than it could be now. Read again that fifth chapter of Genesis; and in the previous chapter there is the record of a race of men descended from Cain, and the culmination of the race in the seventh generation from Cain, in Lamech. Enoch was the seventh generation from Seth. Go back to the conditions of life in that generation in the midst of which Enoch lived. It was a generation of singularly prosperous humanity, on the human level. We find many interesting things. Lamech had several sons. One of them was Jabal, "the father of such as dwell in tents and have cattle." Another was Jubal, "the father of all such as handle the harp and pipe." Tubal-Cain was a great worker in metal. At that period under Lamech there was abuse and godlessness, and independence of control. These conditions existed when Enoch walked with God. The times are no more difficult today. Then, so now, mankind is remarkably successful, in spite of rebellion against God. Man is going on in his cleverness, with his music and mechanical contrivances; and never more so than today; and all the while singing a song of blasphemy against a holy God. Yet even in the midst of that, it is possible to walk with God, to move under the divine direction, to be in agree-

ment with God, to trust and know Him; going step by step, waiting for His movements and accompanying Him therein. This is the life possible to faith. But without faith, as the writer has said, "it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him."

How far are we walking with God? Many have their faces in the Divine direction, and are striving to end the controversy and are trusting Him. And God is trusting such, and marvellously trusting them. Are we keeping step with Him? If so, it is by faith. That is the finest biography that can be written.

Enoch was translated, that he might not see death. When taken from the earthly scene into the life beyond, it was not through the common gateway of death. Some may say that has no application therefore to us. I am not sure. It may have a literal application to some of us; for in the hour that He shall come, we that are alive and remain, as the apostle tells us, shall be caught up to meet Him in the air. There may be a great translation for some.

But is there not something more here? Is it not true that in this Christian dispensation Christians never see death? Jesus said: "He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die." All down these Christian centuries the great procession has moved on, men and women walking with God. Yes; they have died in our common acceptance of the term, and yet in the larger and truer outlook not one of them died. We still speak of "the swellings of Jordan" as if they represented death; as though it was a cold river which we have to cross. It is nothing of the kind. That is the

outlook of those left behind here; but the spirit, ransomed, realizes his translation into the presence of God. What Mrs. Hemans sang about the slave that lay dead in the Georgia rice fields is true, namely, that the body is "A worn-out fetter which the soul has broken and flung away." So in the deepest fact of life, whenever a man walks with God, at the end God receives him.

As we have seen the harmony of Enoch's life, notice the ending. Enoch "was not, for God took him"; took him into partnership, into fellowship, walked with him through all the vicissitudes of the commonplace life, and then at the end gathered him home, that he should not see death. I love the story of the little girl's outlook, when she went home from Sunday School, after hearing the story of Enoch. She said: "Mother, we heard about a wonderful man today in Sunday School." The sensible mother let her child tell what she had heard. "His name was Enoch, and you know, Mother, he used to go for walks with God." The mother said to her: "That is wonderful, dear. How did it end?" "Oh, Mother, one day they walked on and on, and got so far, God said to Enoch, 'You are a long way from home. You had better come in and stay with Me!'"

God has been saying that to our loved ones again and again. They have gone in to stay with Him, with Whom they had walked their earthly pilgrimage.

VII

THE FAITH OF NOAH

SCRIPTURE LESSON: GENESIS VI, 5-14, 22, AND VII. 5.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."—HEBREWS XI. 7.

TAKEN as an illustration of faith, the story of Noah is remarkable and, indeed, unique. In it faith is revealed, acting on the same principles as in other cases, but in unexampled circumstances. I propose that in considering this text we should consider first the man and the times in which he lived; and then attempt to understand something of the operation of his faith in those times.

How much do we really know about Noah? We know he built an ark; and that he got drunk; and that often exhausts the common knowledge of this man Noah. Nevertheless he stands out as one of the most remarkable personalities on the pages of the Old Testament. He must be judged partly by the times in which he lived, and finally by his action in those times.

Take first that story of his getting drunk. Some people seem possessed with that fact, and do not think of him respectfully. But read the story carefully. There is no proof that there was any sin in the action. We are told he "was a husbandman and planted a vine-