

Studies in the Gospel of St. John.

IV.

THE REVELATION OF THE MASTER (CHAPS. xiii.-xvii.).

A NEW section, the second part of the Gospel, commences here, and we notice the transition from the public manifestations of the Messiah to the spiritual revelations of the Master to the disciples in preparation for their great future. As we proceed, it is important to keep the earlier sections well in mind, including the purpose and plan of the Gospel with the three great truths which underlie the whole: Revelation, Rejection, and Reception. We shall now see how the Lord manifested the glory of His love to those who loved Him.

I. THE EDUCATION OF FAITH (chap. xiii.).

To educate is to elicit, to draw out, and our Lord thus "educated" or elicited the faith of His disciples by showing them His love in deed and word. Up to this moment He had been concerned "with His own" (i. 11) who did not receive Him, but now He was to give Himself wholly "to His own" (xiii. 1) who did receive Him. The hour had come for Him to return to the Father; a return to be accomplished through the treachery of one of the disciples and the opposition of the world. He thereupon, conscious of His own Divine mission and dignity, manifests His love for His disciples, and the chapter is easily divided into sections which show the ways in which Christ drew out the faith of His followers.

I. *Humility* (verses 1-20). We are impressed at the outset with the wonderful consciousness of Christ, a consciousness including His human and Divine nature, and of the relationships, Divine and human, which were involved in His redemptive work. Notwithstanding, or rather because of this supreme dignity as man's Redeemer and God's representative, He condescends in loneliness to do menial service. As the Redeemer of man He knew that His hour had come for departing from the world. In relation to evil, He loves His own to the uttermost, knowing that they would be entirely alone after His departure. In regard to God the Father, He knew that all things had been given into His hands, and that as He had come forth from God so He was now returning to

His Father. Thus in this full consciousness of His greatness He expresses His humility and then inculcates it on His disciples.

2. *Faithfulness* (verses 21-30). But even at this moment there was the consciousness of trouble, for the treachery of one of the circle was announced. It would seem as though this constituted the last pleading of love, and after the expression of our Lord's deep grief, the traitor, undisclosed except to John, departed, leaving the Master alone with those who truly loved Him.

3. *Freedom* (verses 31-38). With the alien element gone there came a change in the spirit and teaching of Christ. He realized that the time had come for Him to be glorified, and as He said the words He inculcated a new commandment that they were to "love one another." The newness seems to have lain in the object of the affection, for there had been every kind of love before this time, with the one exception of love to our fellow Christians simply because they and we belong to Christ. Herein lay the newness.

Reviewing this chapter, it has been helpfully pointed out that our Lord in educating or eliciting the faith of His disciples gives three proofs of His permanent love for them (ver. 1). The first was connected with the future of His disciples, for He washed their feet, indicative of the service He would still do for them when He should be on high in order to keep them clean. The second proof was His prediction of the treachery of Judas, so that when the events should reveal themselves their faith would be strengthened instead of weakened. The third was the gift of the new Commandment which, when properly observed, would enable the fellowship between the disciples to continue unbroken. Thus "the disciple whom Jesus loved" presents to us these proofs of the love of the Master (Stuart, *Tracings from the Gospel of John*, p. 294).

II. THE EDIFICATION OF FAITH (chaps. xiv.-xvi.).

To "edify" is to build, and edification here means the building up of that faith which had already been elicited. In this process it is particularly striking to notice that not once does our Lord refer to His death.

1. *Consolation* (chap. xiv.). It is evident that the disciples were deeply concerned with what lay immediately before them, and so the Master struck the keynote, urging them not to fear. As this

exhortation is repeated (ver. 27), it seems clear that some reasons must have been given why they should not be troubled and afraid, and it has been most helpfully suggested that the chapter is really occupied with seven reasons for this consolation. (a) Verses 1-3, the future home. (b) Verses 4-11, the perfect way. (c) Verses 12-14, the guaranteed life. (d) Verses 15-17, the coming Helper. (e) Verses 18-24, the personal Lord. (f) Verses 25, 26, the Divine Teacher. (g) Verse 27, the abiding peace. Then in conclusion the Lord tells them of the true conception of His departure as a reason for joy rather than sorrow, and gives the assurance that it was intended to emphasize His union with the Father (verses 28-31).

2. *Communion* (chap. xv.). This discourse seems to have been delivered on the way from the upper room to Gethsemane (xiv. 31), and our Lord reveals a threefold relationship in regard to the disciples. (a) Their relation to Himself in a life of union and communion (verses 1-11). (b) Their relation to one another in a life of love and service (verses 12-17). (c) Their relation to the world in a life of enmity and persecution (verses 18-27).

3. *Anticipation* (chap. xvi.). These discourses appropriately close by a reference to the ultimate triumphant life of the disciples through the Holy Spirit. (a) The Holy Spirit and the world, emphasizing need (verses 1-11). (b) The Holy Spirit and the disciples, indicating power (verses 12-15). (c) The Master's own presence, promising victory (verses 16-33).

A thoughtful writer has endeavoured to distinguish between these three chapters by suggesting that in chapter xiv. we have personal religion with special reference to the relation of believers to Christ; in chapter xv., social religion with special reference to the relation of believers to one another; and in chapter xvi., universal religion with special reference to the relation of the believer to the world.

III. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FAITH (chap. xvii.).

In this prayer we have the faith as educated (chap. xiii.) and edified (chaps. xiv.-xvi.), confirmed and established. This chapter is the record of the true "Lord's prayer" which enabled the disciples to obtain a fuller revelation of their Master than they had ever had before.

1. *Christ and the Father* (verses 1-5). The keynote is "glorify,"

and is a prayer for His own glorification because He had finished the work given Him to do.

2. *Christ and the Apostles* (verses 6-19). Now He prays for His disciples, and the main thought is suggested by the word "keep." They belong to Christ and the Father, and as they were in a hostile world, alone and without their Master, it would be necessary for them to be kept from evil and consecrated to true service.

3. *Christ and the Church* (verses 20-26). Then the prayer widens out for those who would believe through the word of the disciples, and the main idea seems to be indicated by the word "be." They were to be one as the Father and the Son were one, that the world might believe. And then the prayer closes with a request that all these whom God had given Christ might be with Him in His glory.

In this prayer we can see how wonderfully the Lord restates in the form of petition the various thoughts of chapters xiv.-xvi., and as such, it is no mere addition, but the culmination and ground of the entire section.

Thus, we may think of chapters i.-xii. as the revelation of the Messiah, and chapters xiii.-xvii. as the revelation of the Master.

Another way of looking at these chapters has been suggested as follows: chapter xiv., Consolation (Faith); chapter xv., Instruction (Love); chapter xvi., Prediction (Hope); chapter xvii., Intercession (Glory). No wonder that these chapters have been called "the holiest of all."

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