

knowledge, and thought, and hope, the universality of God's purpose of salvation itself suggests or implies an ultimate salvation for those who die rejecting the salvation offered to them in the Gospel, we shall consider when the entire teaching of the New Testament is before us.

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.

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1 PETER III. 17.

ST. PETER wrote his first epistle to encourage some Christian converts in Asia Minor, who were in much affliction by reason of their heathen surroundings. In spite of all the trials which beset them, he exhorts them to hold fast and persevere in their Christian profession. Among other arguments which he employs is this (iii. 17), "It is better, if the will of God should so will, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing." And he proceeds to support this assertion by examples.

First, as of greatest weight, he sets before them the earthly life of Jesus. It is better, he argues, to suffer as I have told you, for Christ did so. "Christ also hath suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God." Here St. Peter shows both the nature and the motive of Christ's endurance. He who had no sin, who merited no suffering, bore even death itself from the hands of His persecutors, that thus He might finish the work which the Father had given Him to do, and bring salvation near to the unrighteous. It is with such a motive the apostle desires to inspire these Asian Christians: therewith would come to them a share of that strength by which the Lord Himself was supported; their hard trials would be abated of their keenness: their lives would be ennobled, raised above their pains; filled with Christlike compassion and love for them that were ignorant

and out of the way, they would find power to pray, as Christ prayed, "Father, forgive them," and could look forward, wait, labour, suffer, trusting God for the result, strong only in the assurance that their hearts longed to do their Master's service.

As the example of Jesus is here quoted by the apostle to establish his assertion that it is better to suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing, it is right to examine the applicability of the illustration. To sinners whom Christ has redeemed His death brought abundant blessing, it opened unto them the gate of everlasting life. But can the apostle's words be properly applied to Christ Himself?

As if in explanation he continues, "He was put to death in the flesh"—suffering in His case was pushed to the last extremity,—“but He was quickened in the spirit.” It is in the sense given to these latter words that we must find the support for St. Peter's argument. What are we to understand by them? *Ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι*. Their meaning assuredly is not exhausted, if they be interpreted only of the resumption of that life of which Christ's human body was reft at the crucifixion. Their sense is rather, as Grimm explains, *animum quod attinet novis viisque majoribus vitæ viribus auctus*, endowed with new and mightier power. And to this interpretation New Testament Scripture bears abundant witness.

To human sight the incarnate Word had appeared as a man among men; but by His death, resurrection, and ascension His true nature was revealed; He became known as the manifestation of the Godhead: "Truly this Man was the Son of God." This was the new and mightier power which He acquired. One apostle speaks (Heb. ii. 10) of Jesus as *made perfect* through His sufferings,—perfect as a Mediator, perfect as the Captain of our salvation, through whom many sons should be brought unto glory. He is, in the same context, pictured for us as made a little lower

than the angels for the suffering of death, but since His resurrection crowned with glory and honour.

Similarly St. Paul (Phil. ii. 8, 9) testifies of the exaltation of Jesus after, and in virtue of, His sufferings. "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. *Wherefore* God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name." This is what St. Peter means when he writes, Christ "was quickened in the spirit." It was the granting of a full answer to the Lord's consecration prayer (John xvii. 5), offered in full sight of the crucifixion: "Now, O Father, glorify Thou Me . . . with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was."

Yet must we distinguish the latter from the former glory. The eternal Son had shared in the glory of the Father from everlasting; now there is to be seen the glory of the Word made flesh, by whose manifestation men should be brought to know the Father. His eternal glory Christ had for a while veiled in a garb of flesh. After the resurrection He was to take it again, and thereto was to be added that other glory, that men should know and come to the Father through the Son, drawn by that love which had not been ashamed to call them brethren. Thus was Christ quickened, endowed with a mightier force, in the spirit. This was His exaltation, this the gain which resulted from His suffering.

But there was another aspect of Christ's work for men of which the apostle was anxious to remind these Asian converts. That work was not limited to the period of the Lord's earthly life. The incarnation and those events which were decreed to be its sequel formed the crowning act of Christ's love, but His spirit had striven with men ever since sin made redemption necessary. In Abel and Enoch, in the patriarchs and the prophets His voice had been calling men to walk with God, and to realize His loving Fatherhood. In the fulness of time the Son Himself took

our flesh, and by the eternal Spirit offered Himself to God. Thus was made a break, an interruption in the usual working of Christ's spirit by human agents. But that working, which had preceded the brief space of the Lord's personal presence on earth, was also to continue after He had gone into heaven; and He had promised to be present with His servants in a closer sense than heretofore. Thus through all time Christ's spirit had been striving and would strive to bring men unto God. It is to this unwearying love of Christ that St. Peter now refers, to give the new converts strength which shall keep them steadfast, never weary in their own well-doing.

And he makes choice of one instance for their special instruction: selects it, as it seems, because the trials then endured were of the same kind as their own, though fiercer in degree. They had much to endure from the wickedness of their heathen neighbours, to whom the apostle would have them feel that they are sent as Christ's own missionaries. He therefore points them back to the days of Noah, to a world overflowing with sin, and of which the Holy Ghost has testified that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually. Yet even in that dark time the spirit of Christ did not despair. Into the corrupt and doomed world He came in that same spirit by which He afterwards offered Himself to God for the sake of sinners, and preached (*ἐκήρυξε*) through His servant Noah, whom St. Peter in the second epistle calls *δικαιοσύνης κήρυξ*, the preacher of righteousness. For one hundred and twenty years this wicked generation gazed on the voiceless sermon of the growing ark, and heard the oft-repeated admonitions of the preacher; yet for all God's longsuffering they were still disobedient. The Asian Christians could estimate the pain of Noah's life from their own case. His lot would seem harder than their own, and his work was to be done with less numbers to sustain him. Eight persons

on one side, the whole sinful world on the other. Only Christ's spirit was there, or the heart of the preacher of righteousness must have fainted, and have left the doomed sinners to their destruction.

For the lives of these wicked men were forfeit, the fate of their bodies was fixed unchangeably. But for what then did the longsuffering of God tarry during all those years? Why did not the flood come as soon as the sentence was pronounced? The spirit of Christ was there, and had work to be done even in that sin-stained world. The men were shut up to their doom. There was no escape. Their souls were in prison in their sinful bodies; but hope of them had not utterly perished. Christ did not let them go. They were *ἐν φυλακῇ*, in a prison indeed, but not without guardian-care. So the message of warning and the righteous example of the preacher were appointed to work for Christ, and with Christ's help, if haply some soul might repent and live.

Noah truly suffered for well-doing. Neglect, ridicule, mockery, insults in abundance would be heaped upon him. But how does his life illustrate St. Peter's position, "It is better to suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing"? No doubt it was better to be saved than to be drowned. No doubt he felt thankful for his salvation when God shut him into the ark, and after one hundred and fifty days sent him forth to be the father of a new and purer world. But was this all? Why then did the longsuffering of God delay the deluge? The language of St. Peter seems to intimate that Noah was blessed with a further and nobler joy than would come from the preservation of his own life: that as of his Divine Master it was said, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied," so Noah's century-long suffering bore some fruit in the hearts of those among whom he lived.

The ark was a salvation to Noah and his family; but the

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apostle proceeds immediately to treat of the deluge as a type of baptism, and the same figure is not infrequent in other parts of the New Testament. Its full applicability can however hardly be seen unless we conclude that some of those souls, shut up in the prison of their corrupted bodies, were saved when they laid aside their mortal coil. Noah and his family were not washed by the waters of the deluge; *they* were not buried by baptism unto death; there was nothing in *their* case to speak of dying unto sin, and rising again unto righteousness.

But if some souls had hearkened to Christ's spirit in His preacher, and repented of their sin, though their bodies could not escape God's doom, yet death when it came would be a release from their prison-house: they died as far as their sinful bodies were concerned, but their saved souls were raised to a new and purified life. Hence it is that the apostle can tell us in the next chapter, that for this cause the gospel was preached unto them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh: might undergo the sentence which for sin has been passed upon all men, "Ye shall surely die"; but yet might live according to God in the spirit.

With these thoughts impressed on their hearts the Christians to whom St. Peter was writing would be strengthened in their duty, would cease to think of their fiery trial as though some strange thing were happening unto them, would feel that they were bearing their part in the wide communion of sufferers, the righteous for the unrighteous, and would be drawn to act as Christ's servants in former ages had acted, convinced that it is better, not only for themselves, but also (which is a far more exalted motive) for the sinners by whose evil deeds they are afflicted, to suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing.

J. RAWSON LUMBY.

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