

## Studies in the Gospel of St. John.

### V.

#### THE TWO-FOLD ISSUE (CHAPS. xviii.-xxi.).

FROM the private and personal talks with the disciples we turn to the closing chapters in which the two movements of faith and unbelief find their crown and completion. Chapters xviii.-xx. seem at first to be merely historical, as though the inner thought had been set aside for simple narrative. But this is only apparent, for, although the characteristic words Life, Light and Glory are not found, and even other words which were formerly emphatic lose a good deal of their characteristic significance, yet the glory of our Lord shines at every point, and in dying and rising from the dead, life, light and love are abundantly evident. The one thought that runs through the whole section is the two-fold issue of unbelief and faith. In chapters xviii. and xix. the emphasis is placed on unbelief with only a slight reference to belief, while in chapter xx. belief is seen at its full height. All through the section the Father is glorifying the Son (xii. 31-33; xvii. 1). Thus the record is not merely historical and external but expressive of the manifestations of our Lord's love in word and deed. From beginning to end He is the Divine Redeemer, and what is now recorded is seen to be absolutely consistent with all that precedes. The supreme test is triumphantly endured, and in regard has a perfect unity in the uniqueness of His sufferings followed by the uniqueness of His victory.

#### I. THE CULMINATION OF UNBELIEF (chaps. xviii., xix.).

1. *The Betrayal* (chap. xviii. 1-11). In this story we are impressed with our Lord's calm dignity, and the two lines of man's sin and God's plan are kept in view throughout.

#### 2. *The Trial* (chaps. xviii. 12-xix. 16).

(a) *Ecclesiastical* (xviii. 12-27). This Jewish trial is twofold, and again the majesty of the Sufferer is seen. With this is included the denials of Peter, revealing his unfaithfulness as against the faithfulness of John. Then, too, we cannot help observing unscrupulous unbelief set on murder contrasted with the calmness of Christ in reply and His love in protecting His disciples.

(b) Civil (xviii. 28-xix. 16). This trial before the Roman Governor is, in many respects, the most noteworthy feature of this section, especially in its revelation of Pilate's character. The narrative is far fuller than those of the Synoptic Gospels. Four charges were laid against Christ. (1) That he was a malefactor (v. 30); (2) that He made Himself a king (verses 33-37); (3) that He claimed to be the son of God (xix. 7); (4) that He had spoken against Cæsar (xix. 12). It has been pointed out that the scene before Pilate is sub-divided into a series of seven acts or sections. The events occur alternately from the outside to the inside of the Pretorium! Outside (xviii. 28-32); inside (33-38); outside (38-40); inside (xix. 1-4); outside (5-7); inside (8-11); outside (12-16) (Whitelaw, *The Gospel of St. John*, p. 383). A close study of the material as here given reveals in a most remarkable way the character of Pilate, and the narrative is made all the more impressive by the sevenfold "therefore" in xix. 1-21. The contrasts seen here are between the unbelief of the Jews, the vacillation of the Governor, and the glory of our Lord in His words and silence, His calmness and patience.

3. *The Crucifixion* (xix. 17-42). Much at this point is omitted by John, and yet he gives his own incidents. We see the culmination of everything in the sacrificial death of Christ. And in addition to the actual crucifixion (17-22) we have the two groups, consisting of four enemies and four friends (23-27); the two words (28-30); and the two requests (31-42). The love of Christ continues to the end (xiii. 1) and the love of His followers grows stronger in the darkest hour as believers come forth to pay the last offices of respect and affection.

## II. THE CULMINATION OF FAITH (chap. xx.).

Now in marked contrast we see the climax of belief as the former chapters revealed the climax of unbelief. It is a revelation of the glory of Christ in His new and victorious life, and a selection of facts is made to prove this.

1. *The revelation of the fact of resurrection* (verses 1-10). Peter and John saw the empty tomb and the grave cloths, and John was the first to arrive at belief in what had taken place. He saw the cloths "rolled round" in the exact shape of the body as it had lain

in the tomb, and the position of these cloths led John to believe that his Master had been raised from the dead.

2. *The revelation of the Person raised* (verses 11-25).

(a) The revelation to an individual (verses 11-18). This was a manifestation to love, and Mary's sorrow was turned into adoring faith. (b) The revelation to the community (verses 19-23). This was a manifestation to fear, for the Ten were enabled to obtain peace and joy through the appearance of their Master.

3. *The revelation of Person and fact* (verses 24-29). This was a manifestation to doubt, and shows how the last among the Eleven came to believe and utter the supreme declaration "my Lord and my God." Thus, while Thomas went down the lowest, he rose to the highest and "my Lord and my God" is the crown and culmination of the Gospel to which the Author has intended to lead up from the very commencement. The disciples through their experience of their Master came at last to believe not only that He was the Word made flesh (i. 14), but that He was the Word in the beginning, with God and God (i. 1). Thus the Gospel may be said at the end to return to its beginning, and everything that is between is said to be understood in the light of the opening and the close.

The final statement of the purpose of the Gospel is here given to which reference has already been made in detail (xx. 30, 31), and in these verses we find all the characteristic and significant words, phrases and ideas of the entire Gospel.

### III. THE EPILOGUE (chap. xxi.)

This is usually thought to be an appendix, but it is an appropriate close to the Gospel. As the Prologue dealt with the pre-Incarnate Christ (i. 1-18); as the Gospel itself is the record of the Incarnate Christ (i. 19-xx. 29); so we may think of this Epilogue as giving us the picture of the post-Incarnate Christ, and in this, the interpretation of His Personality as realized throughout the entire Christian dispensation. This record very appropriately shows how the scattered disciples were gathered again, and how their Lord was related to them and they to their Lord. Thus, while the material is entirely historical, there is no doubt that the chapter is full of deep spiritual meaning.

1. *The Lord and the Church* (verses 1-14). The thought is that of *Work*. At first the disciples, seven in number, representing the

whole Church, go forth to work of their own will and pleasure, but when they fail they learn to obey their Master and thereby obtain their reward. Work for God must always be marked by faithfulness to our Lord's directions or else failure is inevitable. When we thus carry out His directions we shall find Him by and by on the eternal shore preparing us a welcome (verses 12-14).

2. *The Lord and the Christian* (verses 15-19). The thought is that of *Witnessing*. The disciple is reinstated and his new work is allotted to him.

3. *The Lord and the Future* (verses 20-23). The thought is that of *Waiting*. The statement about St. John was misunderstood and was, therefore, corrected; while the thoughts of the followers of Christ were directed to that "blessed hope," His glorious appearing.

The Gospel closes with the personal attestation, identifying the writer of it (verses 24, 25). And so the end matches the beginning, and the same ideas are found here as in the Prologue. Just as that spoke of His pre-Incarnate work, so this tells of His post-resurrection work. Just as that recorded His rejection, so that tells of His reception. Just as that narrated His First Coming, so this anticipates His Second Coming.

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(*To be concluded.*)

