

THE INCARNATION AND JUDGMENT.

I.

“And hath given Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of man.”—*John v. 27.*

NOTHING is more remarkable than the utter absence of any sense of real failure, much less despair, in our Lord.

Writers who love to speak about His “moods” and His “discouragements” ought to ask where, in all that He said about His coming sufferings, did He omit to make mention of the glory that should follow.

He was as certain that He should rise again as that He should die; and however we reckon or explain the mention of “three days,” not to say “three days and nights,” one thing is abundantly evident, that the difficulty they involve would not exist if the predictions were later than the event, a product of the brooding imagination of the Church.

He did not fail, nor was He discouraged; and this may help us, who think He shared all our innocent sorrows, to judge whether this cup that He rejected is not really due to a failure of faith in God.

So buoyant was the confidence of our Lord, not only in His destiny, but in His absolute and perfect acceptance, hourly, before God, that His daily human existence, His life in “the days of His flesh,” was aware that He alone among the sons of men should not be brought into judgment. Not only so, but it was before Him that all nations should be gathered; the Father should judge no man except through Him. Of whatever He then “emptied Himself,” this thrilling consciousness remained undimmed. And all this the Synoptic Gospels declare at least as plainly as St. John.

The text goes further still.

It declares that the Incarnation of Jesus is the very

reason why He shall be our Judge. The Father hath given Him authority to execute judgment, not because He is the Son of God, and therefore sufficiently wise, but because He is the Son of man, and therefore in His hands the judgment of human lives will assume a profounder meaning.

I. In the first place, God's plan for our recovery from the fall would not be completed unless it were man who subdues the rebellion of mankind. We fell, not by the violence of Satan, but by his persuasion, seducing us. And therefore, as many scriptures indicate, God has willed that His dominion should be restored to Him, and the ravages of the fall recovered, not by His overwhelming power, but by His influence over man, penetrating, supplanting the tempter's evil influence, and not so much conquering human nature as enabling it to conquer.

Therefore He sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem them that are under the law.

“Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead, for as in Adam all die, so in Christ (equally Man) shall all be made alive.” And in pursuit of this thought, namely, of the recovery from the fall being by man, we read that Christ as man shall reign till all things are put under His feet, and only then shall surrender the kingdom to God, even the Father, that man's share in the empire may be ended, and God be all in all.

There is indeed a tremendous majesty in this revealed fact, that at the close of the mighty conflict, in the hour of

The ending of the days and ways of men,
The shaking of the sources of the sea—

when the King shall deal out fate to those on His right hand and His left, saying, “Come, ye blessed,” and “Depart, ye cursed”—when the last crime shall be avenged, the last evil crushed, the fetters of the last oppression stricken off the

limbs of the last sufferer for righteousness in all the universe, then the final buffet, the conclusive vindication, shall be dealt by our Captain, who leads us now; and the King, enthroned and crowned, shall be the same whose visage was more marred than that of any man; and a son of our race, so long tempted and bewildered and misled, shall speak the final sentence, and pronounce the supreme vindication of all righteousness after having endured the supreme injustice, and shall restore to His Father at last the sceptre of a recovered and obedient universe.

II. Again, the fact that the Son of man shall be the Judge demolishes at one stroke the whole cobweb of excuses and special pleas by which men make little of their sins.

We all know that it is not sin which tempts us, but some sweetness, for the sake of which we dip our hands in sin. Else how could our Lord have been tempted? He could not be allured by evil. But He could be and was attracted by relief from hunger, by recognition as miraculous, and by a boundless dominion. These blameless and desirable things attracted Him toward the ambush, the lurking place where sin lay hidden. Their attraction was innocent and inevitable; and yet sin would have begun if, for the sake of them, He had consented to move one step toward meeting the evil in the road to them.

Now we fancy that our own temptation, the one which is able to press us hardest, presses too hard for flesh and blood to endure.

Looking at other sinners, it seems quite another thing; we are not, we persuade ourselves, like them; because, when temptation assails ourselves, our senses and our imagination are excited by the tempter's bribe: the air is laden as with intoxicating odours; our ears are importuned by siren whispers; and all the splendour of the forbidden fruit dazzles us. We do not think it very bad to yield to so great a strain—or rather the question of badness is quite

forgotten in the rush of a sudden impulse, or under the slow, incessant, wearying urgency of desire. And even when conscience calls our action by its true name—"sin," while admitting that the epithet may, to some extent, apply, we are still reluctant to plead guilty to all that this ugly word implies.

It follows that, if God as God were to judge us, we should bitterly resent the difference between His view of things, from the light inaccessible, and our experience of them, when plunged in a sea of temptation and evil example, with all bad influences foaming and roaring around and over us, where He that is righteous maketh Himself a prey.

Vaguely and in an abstract way we might own ourselves guilty; but always there would be some lurking underthought: Thou art a hard master, demanding the impossible, reaping where Thou hast not sown, and gathering where Thou hast not strawn.

But who shall dare to say this to Jesus? Who shall urge the stress and allurement of desire before Him who refused all the kingdoms of the world and their glory? or plead the dread of pain before Him, who at the beginning, famishing with forty days of fast, refused bread; and at the end—haunted by such a doom that again and again He drew His disciples apart to tell them of it, but they could not understand nor think it more than figure and parable—steadfastly set His face, and went forward, wrung with the agony of the garden to the horror and shame of the scourging and the cross, the anguish of spiritual desertion, and the ignominy of the tomb? Is it to Him that we dare falter out our poor excuses, born of cowardice, oversoftness, greed of this world, forgetfulness of Him, and of God?

Or shall we plead that He brought to His task an unpolluted manhood, while ours is tainted from the fall, and ask how can the children of wrath emulate His obedience and His self-denial?

But was it not for this very purpose that He took our nature, to redeem us from the fall, that where sin abounded grace should much more abound ?

Has He not undone, explicitly and verbally, this excuse of our weak flesh and blood, by offering His Flesh to be meat and His Blood to be drink indeed—His humanity to be within us the fountain of a new and victorious manhood, Christ living in us ?

Well, then, if all such pleas must needs be silent, one day, before His throne, shall we not cease to urge these abject excuses now ?

This is our second point, that in the judgment, by the Incarnation of our Judge, all the defences of the ungodly shall be utterly broken down.

III. Lastly, the announcement that Christ is Judge, made beforehand, removes from His own people all the terrors of that great day.

Except in Christ, it may be said that God is still remote from us. No man hath seen Him at any time ; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him. Only as revealed in Christ can man acquaint himself with Him and be at peace.

And thus it is not before God, the august, spiritual, changeless Inhabitant of Eternity, that we could willingly stand at last, without a Mediator, when the priestly office is at an end, to give a reckoning of resolutions half kept, a pilgrimage full of halts and wanderings, of frail virtues, and a trembling faith.

Let us thank Him that He has willed that at the last it is before our Saviour we shall stand.

“ I remember,” we shall say, “ the careless, unregenerate worldly days. But these I brought to Thee ; and Thou didst wash them out in Thine own blood.

“ I remember many a failure, many a transgression since. But for all these Thou wast my Priest and Advocate,

Thou knewest them, and for Thy merit they were forgiven, and peace and joy were poured into my fainting heart anew.

“ My very services have been weak and unworthy, my prayers wandering, my love of Thee most cold—I confess it all—but yet, wast Thou not with me when the poor prayer was answered, and the heart warmed? Wast Thou not a hand to strengthen and a voice to cheer me at the worst—always my Saviour, my Companion, and my Friend? Master, it is not THOU Who wilt ever reproach me with these again.”

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ARE THERE TWO EPISTLES IN 2 CORINTHIANS?

A REPLY.

DR. KENNEDY'S articles in the EXPOSITOR for September and October afford an excellent example of an argument based solely on internal evidence. I hope to be able to show that the phenomena presented by 2 Corinthians do not really support his theory, that two epistles have in this case been clumsily joined together; but although his reasonings do not bring conviction, one learns as much from studying the methods of inquiry adopted by so acute a scholar as if the result were true.

Dr. Kennedy grants at the outset that there is not a shred of external testimony from either MSS., Versions, or Christian writers, that the integrity of 2 Corinthians was ever doubted until the days of Semler in the 18th century. This is the more noteworthy if we bear in mind that archetypal defects, and omissions due to varying authentic editions, have left their traces in extant MSS. Thus the loss from some MSS. and Versions of the last verses of St. Mark's Gospel is very probably due to the fact that the first copy which reached Alexandria had lost the last page. Dr. Salmon (*Some Criticism of the Text of the New Test.*, p.