

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

by

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CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE SHEKINAH

“While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: [and they feared as they entered into the cloud, Luke, 9:34;] and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matthew 17:5).

A new phenomenon now occurs on the holy mount. We have reached, the most interesting part of this portion of sacred history. Let us collect our thoughts, in order calmly and adoringly to consider,

- I. The bright cloud;
- II. The testimony which proceeded from it.

I. This bright cloud had an important and sublime signification

It was the Shekinah, or divine habitation, the sign of the Lord’s peculiar presence, like that vouchsafed in the early days of the Old Testament. In the time of Moses, a cloud, resembling a pillar rising towards heaven, formed the habitation in which the Lord God went before his people Israel in the wilderness. He also invested in a cloud the manifestation of himself on Mount Sinai. At the dedication of Solomon’s Temple **“a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; the glory of the Lord had filled the house. Then said Solomon, The Lord hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness.”**

But a cloud somewhat different from that on Sinai, and in the Temple, was here. No stormy tempest accompanies it. It carries no rolling thunders, as on Sinai; no lightnings flash from it; nor is it accompanied with thick darkness, but glittering as if the sun shone behind it, and bordered with light as with the dayspring from on high. Thus this cloud appears as announcing the beginning of a new covenant period.

Moses and Elias enter with Jesus into the cloud as into a presence-chamber, or as into a Father’s house. How far from that ancient leader of Israel now is the expression, **“I exceedingly fear and quake!”** with which he once approached the darkness wherein God dwelt! Nor does Elias now cover his face as he did upon Horeb.

Both of them have become strong to bear the nearness of the Eternal. They are so in Him who accompanies them, and who took them under the shadow of his wings.

II. **“And behold, a voice out of the cloud which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him”**

This voice came from no far distant height, but from the bright cloud which now overshadowed Jesus, Moses and Elias. It is the voice of Him **“who sitteth upon the throne between the cherubim, who clotheth himself with light as with a garment.”** It is the voice of the everlasting Father. He, from whom are all things, clothes his almighty voice in human language, and audibly testifies concerning the Son of man.

O the blessed realities of the holy mount! Surely they are an anticipation of the fulfillment of the great prophetic voice out of heaven, **“The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God”** (Revelation 21:3).

This testimony on the holy mount is rich in meaning. First, it comprehends, in a very few words, the sum of the Old Testament, which, in Christ Jesus, is Yea and Amen. **“This is my Son!”** is from the book of Psalms. **“Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.”** The addition, **“In whom I am well pleased,”** is out of the prophets, namely, in Isaiah 42:1. The words, **“Hear ye him,”** you will find in the writings of Moses. **“A prophet like unto me, shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, of your brethren, like unto me. Unto him shall ye hearken.”**

There is, moreover, in these words, a reference to the three offices of our Lord.

- **“This is my Son,”** shows us Christ as a King.
- **“In whom I am well pleased,”** points him out as the Mediator and High Priest, in whom God reconciles the world unto himself.
- **“Hear ye him,”** represents him to us as that Prophet to whose instructions we must listen.

Finally, this testimony throws light upon the relative character which the Redeemer bears.

- The voice, **“This is my Son,”** tells us who he is, with respect to his divine nature and incarnation.
- The relation he bears to us is also implied in the words, **“In whom I am well pleased.”**
- In the injunction, **“Hear ye him.”** So full of meaning are these Divine words; indeed, who is able to express all the fullness of meaning which is contained in them!

We already know the intention of this great testimony of God the Father. It doubtless addressed itself, first, to the five witnesses of Christ’s transfiguration, before whom, as the representatives of the visible and invisible Church, Christ is here solemnly proclaimed the priestly Head of the new kingdom, and his dominion over all things, and especially over the church, purchased with his own blood, was here formally ratified to him by the Father. We may, however, well believe that the testimony of the Father is also intended, like that at Jordan, for the Saviour himself, and was to afford support to his faith, in the prospect of his approaching sufferings.

And cannot we perceive, that after each of these his Father's public acknowledgments, a new power appears in him, a new grace manifests itself in his discourses, a new ardor in his words and actions, and a more exalted state of mind for conflict and victory? Yes; in his human nature he grew like his people, and went from strength to strength.

“This is my beloved Son.” The Father calls him his beloved Son, in a sense and meaning which can belong to no other being on earth or in heaven. This appellation bespeaks him to be no mere creature; it avouches heaven to be his throne, and earth his footstool. It evinces him to be the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.

It presents him to us as the Word that was with God, and was God, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing is made that was made; though now made flesh, and dwelling or tabernacling among us, as the true Shekinah, in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

Oh, how happy are we, to find our faith thus founded on God in Christ, and sustained by the immediate testimony and glory of God the Father. Everything depends upon the certainty of this article of our faith, **“God manifest in the flesh.”** The whole edifice of Christianity rests upon this one prime truth.

You know, Paul calls this mystery “incontrovertibly great,” and certainly it is so, in whatever way we consider it. It is great, in its amazing contents—God in man! Great by its mighty achievements—having cast down a thousand infernal strongholds and refuges of lies, by which the deceiver of the whole world holds men in the bondage of sin, fear, and temptation. Great by its unexampled operation—it plants a new creation in the old.

Great by the continuation of divine power—it daily delivers fresh victims from the depths of Satan. Great on account of the glorious promises connected with it—for all the nations which God hath made shall come and worship him through this mystery, and shall glorify his name.

Indeed, what may we not perceive by the light of this single truth, **“God manifest in the flesh?”**

- We may see heaven open, and behold the eternal mansions of poor sinners prepared for them.
- We may see this earth, once the seat of the curse, hereby transformed into a residence of the glory of God, a scene of the greatest wonders of his love.
- We may see the fallen sons of Adam renewed unto holiness.
- We may hereby see the fountain of Divine mercy opened to us, of whose depths we formerly had no conception;
- We may perceive a Divine and human Saviour upon the throne of power, who is not ashamed to call us brethren; with the holy angels for ministering spirits to him and to us.

Well, therefore, the apostle calls the mystery of **“God manifest the flesh,” “the pillar and ground of the truth.”**

Certainly the whole temple of our happiness rests upon this one truth.

The Father calls the Lord Jesus, “**his beloved Son.**” But who can fathom the depth of this expression, “**My beloved?**” In all human or angelic love there is no parallel to this. Didst thou even know how human glorified spirits love, yea, how angels love one another, still this love of the Father would be found infinitely to excel it all. Who, from a mere drop of water, can learn the extent and depth of the ocean? Who, from the dim light of a candle, can conceive of the blaze of noon, and the extent of the solar rays? Yet those are but comparisons of things finite with finite. And yet this beloved Son, O sinner, God spared not for thee: he SO loved the world, that he gave him for thee, that, believing in him, thou shouldst not perish, but have everlasting life!

Who shall comprehend the full import contained in that SO? Eternity alone can disclose it.

And yet, who is it to whom the voice of the Father thus bears testimony? Is it not to him, who, as the second Adam, represents ourselves, as our covenant Head and Surety? Surely this testimony of the Father’s complacential love is borne likewise in favor of all who belong to Christ; that is, of all who abide in him, and keep his commandments. Therefore, they may well refresh and strengthen themselves with the same Divine love and kindness.

To the declaration, “**This is my beloved Son,**” is added the testimony, “**in whom I am well pleased.**” The Father beholds his own glorious perfections in him, and besides this, he beholds in him the Mediator for us, and with this he is well pleased also. Jesus said, “**For their sakes I sanctify myself;**” and the Father is perfectly complacent in his so doing. Here, then, we see our own interest in the testimony given in the holy mount. Are we the devoted followers, the obedient disciples of Jesus? Then the Father who is well pleased in him, is well pleased in us for his sake; is well pleased with us in him.

“**Hear ye him!**” is the conclusion of the voice from the cloud. Christ is the Truth, as well as the Way and the Life. Had he not come as the teacher of this ignorant and benighted world, what should we ever have known that is worth the knowing? We should have been like poor forsaken orphans, and should have been ever at a loss to know what we are, where we are, and what is to become of us. We should have been forlorn wanderers indeed, in the valley of the shadow of death. No prophet would then have carried a torch before us. No apostle could have showed us the path of life. Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, and all the rest, shone not by their own light, but by the light of the Sun of righteousness.

They were but as moons, some of them only in the first quarter, others more advanced, and some were as full moons, possessing bright, undiminished splendor. The same remark applies all our teachers under the New Testament disposition. The great office of them all is to bear witness to Christ, the Sun of righteousness.

“**Hear ye him!**” This needful admonition suggests a mournful reflection upon our present moral condition. Think only, that to a race of beings who, spiritually considered, know not as it were their right hand from their left, a Saviour is sent, who is as much at home beyond the stars as on this side of them, and whose ministry, as proceeding forth from God, is sealed with proofs sufficient to astonish heaven and earth.

This Saviour comes, saying to the world, "I will remove all darkness and doubts from before you; I will explain to you the mystery of your existence; I will teach you the true nature of God and of man; I will unfold to you the remotest ages that are past, and the most distant of those that are to come; I will show you the way of peace, and point out to you the open gate of a new Paradise."

Might we not reasonably expect that the whole world would immediately gather around him, and that all the race of Adam would sit, like Mary, at his feet; or be like Samuel, who said, "**Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth?**" But how very different is the fact! There has been, alas, no lack of teachable disciples at the feet of erroneous teachers, false prophets and vain babblers; but in the church of the great Dayspring from on high there has always been room to spare, even to the present hour. Not as though there were any want of authentication of his doctrine. No: the sole reason of it is the corruption of the human heart; the deep depravation of human nature.

Not as though the Gospel did not exactly befit our human necessities; for nothing can be more suitable to them than the remedies it brings: but this is the cause—that the sinner neither knows nor cares to know his own most urgent necessities. Nor is it that the Gospel is unintelligible; for it is, in all its most essential matters of faith, within the comprehension of a child. But it opposes the vain delights and desires of our fleshly mind, which loves darkness rather than light, that it may not meet with any check to its own willfulness. Neither does the Saviour impose any heavy yoke upon man! Oh no; "**his yoke is easy, and his burden light.**" But the degenerate creature, in its rebellion and pride, will not hear of any yoke at all, and will obey nothing but the dictates of its own fleshly will.

"**Hear ye him!**" How important a testimony is this to the whole of the New Testament revelation! Let us then learn to read and listen to every word of Christ, as if the testimony of the Father, "**Hear ye him,**" were still sounding in our ears.

When the Saviour saith, "**Without me ye can do nothing;**" and testifies, "**I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me,**" when he promises eternal life to those who believe on his name, and threatens the unbelieving with the wrath of God, and with a fire prepared for the devil and his angels, forget not the voice of Majesty, which said, "**Hear ye him.**" He then who refuses to hear the Son of God, refuses to hear the Father. Not to hear him and receive his words, what is it but to make God a liar? But "**He that hath received the testimony of Jesus, hath set to his seal that God is true**" (John 3:33).

But what kind of a hearing is it which the Father here enjoins? It is the hearing of our implicit and cordial faith. "**He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.**"

This passage of Scripture is like the pillar of cloud and of fire between the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. It secures the salvation of believers, and the condemnation of unbelievers.

Let us only further notice how the apostles of Christ refer to this testimony of the Father as one of the most powerful arguments for the truth of their doctrine.

“We have not followed,” says Peter, “cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Let this testimony then remain ever present to our faith. If you are looking for a polestar amidst the confusion of the present unbelieving age, it beams upon you from this testimony. The voice from the holy mount will serve to dispel all the doubts of your mind.

“There are,” says an enlightened writer, “two sorts of persons that deserve the name of men of understanding. Those who serve God with their whole heart, because they know him; and those who, though they know him not, seek him with their whole heart.”

He adds, “There are in world, spiritually considered, three sorts of persons.

- The first have found God, and serve him.
- The second have not yet found him, but seek him.
- The third live without either serving or seeking him.

The first sort are wise and happy; the last sort are unhappy, wicked, and foolish; the second sort are wise, but not yet happy,”

“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Amen.

~ end of chapter 31 ~

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