

Occupation with Christ

BY EDWARD DENNETT.

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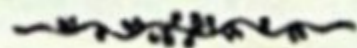
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JOHN vi. 53-58.

THE subject on which I would meditate a little is wider than is suggested by the Scripture read. Here we have "eating the flesh of the Son of Man, and drinking His blood," and "eating" Christ Himself; but I desire to consider the whole subject of feeding upon or occupation with Christ. Combining, then, other scriptures with this, we are said to feed upon Christ in three characters: as the Passover Lamb, as the Manna, and as the Old Corn of the Land; for I

need scarcely say that all these three things are types of Christ. In the chapter before us we have especially Christ as the Manna (32, 33, 48-50, etc.); and a reference to Him also as the Passover Lamb (comp. 4th verse with verse 53, etc.); but we shall have to turn to the Epistles to find Him in the character which answers to the old corn of the land (Joshua v. 11).

(1.) We will take first Christ as the Passover Lamb, as the food of His people. If we go back to the history of Israel, we shall find that they kept the Passover in Egypt (Exodus xii.); in the wilderness (Numbers ix.); and in the land (Joshua v.). The question then arises, When do we feed upon Christ as the Passover Lamb? It is sometimes said that we only do this at the outset, when, convicted of sin,

we fear the approach of God as a Judge; and that as soon as we have deliverance, we thereafter cease to feed upon Him in this character. If this be so, why does Israel keep the Passover both in the wilderness and in the land? I think, therefore, that it will be seen that we never cease to keep the Passover; and, moreover, that the place in which we thus feed upon Christ *depends upon our states of soul.*

Every believer knows what it is (has known what it is) to feed upon the roast Lamb in Egypt. Awakened by the Spirit of God, alarmed by the impending judgment, brought under the shelter of the precious blood, how eagerly we fed upon the Lamb that had passed through the fires of God's holiness, when bearing our sins on the

tree! True, it was with bitter herbs that we ate it, for we then had a sight of our sins—in measure according to God; and with girded loins, and shoes on our feet, and our staff in our hand, for already Egypt had become morally a desert, and we were only waiting for the word of the Lord to commence our pilgrim journey. It was a time much to be remembered, for it was the beginning of months—the first month of the year of our spiritual life.

But while every believer has passed through this experience, it is to be feared that many feed upon the roast lamb in Egypt all their lives. Not knowing deliverance through the death and resurrection of Christ, or even peace with God as the result of the sheltering blood, they feed upon Christ only as the One who by His

death bars the way to God as a Judge; and consequently they do not know God as their God and Father in Christ Jesus. Such a state of soul is both to be deprecated and deplored; for it is the result either of bad teaching, or of the unbelief of the heart in the fulness of the grace of God.

Passing now from Egypt, the next place in which Israel kept the Passover was the wilderness: and they were told to keep it there "according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof" (Numbers ix. 3). The wilderness is the place of every believer when viewed as a pilgrim. The world has become a desert to him, and he is passing through (as not of) it, because he is waiting for the return of his Lord. How then does he feed upon Christ

as the slain Lamb in the wilderness? "It is participation by grace in the power of the death and resurrection of Christ," by which we have been brought out of the enemy's territory—delivered from the power of Satan and redeemed unto God. In the wilderness we feed upon the Passover as the memorial of our deliverance from Egypt; and in it we see Christ going down into death, and not only bearing all the judgment that was our due—going through and exhausting it, but also as meeting and conquering all the power of the enemy—destroying him that had the power of death, and thereby bringing us out from the house of bondage, and setting us free as the children, and for the service, of God. In the wilderness, therefore, we feed upon the Passover Lamb as

pilgrims and strangers—knowing deliverance, but not as yet come to the land of which the Lord has spoken. Hence in this character we not only value (according to our faith) the precious blood, and delight to contemplate its wondrous efficacy as clearing us for ever from every charge and claim of the enemy, but we also feed upon the death of Christ as such because of our death (and resurrection) in Him, by which we have been brought out into a new place, where we can look back upon death and judgment as being for ever behind us.

In the land the Passover assumed another character still, and one too which should also find its correspondence with the believer now. It is very evident that to the Israelite it

would have a much fuller significance when he was across the Jordan than when he was in the desert. It would be to him now the memorial—not simply of deliverance from Egypt and Egypt's thralldom and power, but of *accomplished* salvation. For in truth his position in the land, while it was to the glory of God's faithfulness and grace in the performance of all that He had promised ("for there failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel: all came to pass," Joshua xxi. 45), was the consequence of the shed blood. In other words, the blood of the Passover lamb laid the foundation for the accomplishment of God's purposes; and hence to those whose eyes were opened, the blood would have a far greater value when over the Jordan

than when in the waste, howling wilderness.

So now. For we have a position which agrees entirely with being in the land; for not only have we been quickened together with Christ, but we are also raised up together, and *made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus* (Ephesians ii.). This is the place before God of every believer; but whether we are occupying it depends upon whether we know death and resurrection *with*, as well as *in and through*, Christ; whether we have crossed the Jordan as well as the Red Sea. It is our privilege to do so: indeed, we ought never to be content until, by the grace of God, we do know what it is to be seated in spirit in the heavenly places. But if we are there, we cannot dispense with the Passover.

On the other hand, the more fully we apprehend the character of the place into which we are brought, the more the riches of the grace of God are unfolded to us, the more delightedly, and with enlarged apprehensions, we shall look back to the Cross, and feast upon the death of Him whose precious blood alone has made our place in the heavenlies possible for us. But our feeding upon Him now will partake more of the character of communion with God in the death of His Son. Our eyes will then be opened to discover, not so much the blessings which have thereby been secured to us, as that God in évery attribute of His character has been fully glorified in that death. We shall thus (if we may so speak) feast with God when we keep the passover in the heavenly

places; and the effect on our souls will be adoration and praise: in a word, worship of the highest character will be the result of our feeding upon the Slain Lamb when seated in the heavenlies. For we are seated there in peace before God—already in possession of our place in His presence; and it is only then that we can have communion with His own thoughts, and with His own joy in the death of His Son.

We see, therefore, that we feed upon Christ as the Passover Lamb in every stage of our experience; but the place in which we do so—Egypt, the wilderness, or the land—will depend upon our states of soul. And no doubt, when we are gathered together to show the Lord's death until He come, there are often side by

side those who are in the wilderness, and those who are in the land. Still they feed alike upon the death of Christ, remember Him as dead, whatever the difference in their apprehensions, or in their experiences or attainments. In heaven itself, indeed, we shall contemplate that death with ever-increasing adoration; for the blood of the Lamb will be the theme of glorified saints throughout eternity.

(2.) Christ as the Manna is also the food of His people. The manna differs from the roast lamb, in that it was confined to the wilderness. It was not until Israel had been brought through the Red Sea that the manna was given (see Exodus xvi.); and it "ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel

manna any more, but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year" (Joshua v. 12). It was, therefore, the wilderness food of Israel; and in like manner Christ, as the manna, is the wilderness food for the believer. But a distinction has to be made. Inasmuch as the history of Israel, passing through the desert, crossing the Jordan, and occupying the land, is typical, they could only be in one place at a time. The believer is at the same moment in the wilderness and in the heavenlies. For service, for the expression of Christ down here, viewed as a pilgrim, waiting for the return of the Lord, he is in the desert; his position before God, as united to a glorified Christ, is ever in the heavenly places—whether he occupies it, is another question. Hence, supposing

him to know his place, he needs the manna and the old corn at the same time. In other words, he needs to feed upon Christ in both aspects. *He is never in Egypt*, whatever his experiences; for that would be to deny the truth of his deliverance through the death and resurrection of Christ. A quickened soul may be in Egypt, but a believer—meaning by this term one who has been brought into the true Christian place by the indwelling Spirit—has done for ever with Egypt; for the world has become to him a moral wilderness; and it is as being in the wilderness that he feeds upon Christ as the manna.

What, then, is the manna for the believer? It is Christ in incarnation—a humbled Christ. "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses

gave you not that bread from heaven, but My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever: and the bread which I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John vi. 32, 33, 49-51). Christ is thus the manna in all that He was in the flesh—in the expression of what He was both as the revealer of the Father and as the perfect man. His grace, compassion, tenderness, and love—His meekness

and lowliness of heart—His patience, forbearance, and long-suffering—His example—all these things are found in the manna which God has given to us for food during our sojourn in the wilderness.

He is continually presented to us in the manna-character in those epistles which especially deal with the desert-path of the saint. “Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, *looking unto Jesus*, the author and finisher of faith; who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For *consider Him* that endured such

contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds" (Heb. xii. 1-3). That is, we are exhorted to feed upon Christ as the manna to sustain us amid the trials, difficulties, and persecutions incident to the desert. In like manner Peter, who writes particularly "to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus," etc., continually leads us to Christ in this aspect. "What glory is it if, when ye be buffeted for your fault, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, *leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps*, etc. (1 Peter ii. 20-24; see also chap. iii. 17, 18). The Apostle Paul, too, feeds the saints with manna.

For example, though it contains more, we have it in Philippians ii. 5-9—manna, we might say, of the most precious character. "Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." But it is in the Gospels that the manna lies gleaming round us on every side, and where it is to be gathered for use as the needs of each day may require. For there it is that we have the unfoldings of the wondrous life—the life of Him who was the Perfect Man, and, at the same time, God manifest in flesh.

Two remarks, however, may be made as to the collecting and use of the manna. The Israelites *went out of the camp* to gather at a certain rate every day (Exodus xvi. 4). We must

go down for the same purpose. That is, unless we know our place in the heavenlies, and in truth, what it is to feed upon the old corn of the land, we shall scarcely be able to feed upon the manna. This is remarkably brought out in the Apostle Paul's ministry: he began with Christ in glory. So must it be with us. When we know our union with a glorified Christ, our place in Him before God, we shall feast with intensified delight upon Christ as the manna. Historically the manna came before the old corn, but the order should be reversed for the believer—for the simple reason that God has so reversed it in the presentation of Christ to our souls. We preach, as Paul did, a Christ in glory; and when He is thus apprehended, then, and not until then, we

can find in a humbled Christ our food while in the wilderness. Hence the great loss, and consequent weakness, of those who are never permitted to hear of Christ in glory; whose only thought of Him is as once dwelling down here in the flesh, when He was made in the likeness of men.

The second remark is the very obvious and often repeated one, that the manna cannot be *stored* for use. Every one must gather it every day according to his eating (Exodus xvi. 16): and if he gather more—unless it be for “the Sabbath”—it will surely become corrupt. No, beloved friends, there must be the constant feeding upon Christ, day by day and hour by hour; and we can never receive more than our need for the moment requires. Thereby we are kept in continual

dependence; and our eyes are ever directed to Christ. "As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me shall live by Me" (John vi. 57).

(3.) There remains to be considered Christ as the old corn of the land. In the passage already referred to (Joshua v. 10-12), we have the passover, the manna, and the old corn mentioned together, and this fact makes the interpretation the more manifest. If therefore the manna is Christ in Incarnation, the old corn, inasmuch as the land typifies the heavenly places, of necessity points to Christ in glory. And we shall find that He is so presented to us in the epistles, as the sustenance and strength of our souls, and so presented as our proper nourishment, even though believers may be

regarded in the epistle, not, as in the Ephesians, as seated in the heavenlies in Christ, but as in Colossians and Philippians (and, indeed, in 2nd Corinthians), as down here upon the earth; for though still down here they are united to Him where He is.

Take Colossians first. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection [have your mind] on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (iii. 1-3). Here, it is true, we have "*the things* which are above;" but it is evident that by this term is meant the whole sphere of blessing of which Christ in glory is the centre—the Spiritual blessings in heavenly places in fact, into the pos-

session of which we are brought, and all of which are summed up in Christ. These therefore are "the old corn of the land," "the fruit of the land of Canaan," the proper food and sustenance for those who have died, and are risen with Christ.

In Philippians iii. we have the same truth brought before us. For what have we there but a glorified Christ as filling the vision of the Apostle's soul, and as the satisfying portion of his heart? Thus if we have the manna in chapter ii., we most surely have the old corn of the land in chapter iii. One more instance may be cited—2 Corinthians iii. 18: "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the spirit of the Lord."

Hence, too, the value of the constant expectation of Christ. It attracts us to the person of the glorified Christ, engages our hearts with Him, and fills our souls with longing desires for that time when we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is (1 John iii. 2).

All these passages, and many more of a kindred character direct us to Christ in glory as the old corn of the land; but this is food with which we cannot dispense; no other will so nourish or impart such strength to the saint. It is heavenly food for heavenly people; and it is only when we are feeding upon it that we can be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might; that we can make war with the enemy for the possession (the occupation) of our inheritance; that

we are made willing to undergo anything and everything—fellowship with the sufferings of Christ, being made conformable unto His death, if in any way we may arrive at the resurrection from among the dead (Philippians iii.), when we shall be glorified together with Him who has been the strength and sustenance of our souls.

It should be remarked, too, that there is no power to express Christ in our walk down here excepting as we are occupied with Him in glory. He should thus be, in this character, ever before us; and He will be when, taught of the Spirit, we can say to Him, "All our springs, all the sources of our joy, are in Thee." And He Himself desires this; for He said to His disciples, when speaking of the coming Spirit of truth, "He shall glorify Me; for

He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you" (John xvi. 14, 15).

Occupation with Christ is, therefore, the Alpha and the Omega of the Christian life; occupation with His death—that death which laid the foundation not only of our own redemption and deliverance, but also of the reconciliation of all things; occupation with Him in incarnation, when, though He were the Son, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered, when, as the obedient and dependant Man, He found His meat in doing the Father's will and in finishing His work, and thus glorified God in every detail of that

wondrous life; and, above all, occupation with Him in the glory—as the glorified Man—the centre of all God's counsels, and the object of all His delight; yea, the satisfying portion of His heart. It is thus by occupation with, feeding upon, contemplating Christ, that we are brought, in the power of the Spirit, into fellowship with God; enabled to enter into His own thoughts concerning, and even to share His own affections for, that Blessed One who is now seated at His own right hand. Surely here then is the source of all growth, strength, and blessing!

Blessed Lord Jesus! keep Thyself so constantly before our souls, and so unfold Thyself in all Thy grace and beauty to our hearts, that, drawing out our affections, we may desire to

have nothing, to see nothing, and to know nothing but Thyself; for in Thee dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and we are complete in Thee—2 Colossians ii. 9, 10.

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