

DIVINE SERVICE.

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(HEB. VIII. ; IX. 1.)

AT Sinai God made a covenant with Israel, but what followed on that was complete breakdown. Here we get God promising a new covenant, and what marks all connected with that is, that it is entirely outside the breakdown. When we get to this chapter we are lifted entirely outside the failure and the ruin that is here, because everything hangs upon God, not upon man. I want to dwell upon that to make the ground clear, that while it does bring in the "us" at the end of the previous chapter, and this chapter says "we have," still it is the holy brethren, not viewed in connection with the breakdown, nor even in connection with their individual circumstances of trial and pressure and difficulty (the earlier part of the epistle has been occupied with that, and how it is met), but viewed here as Christ's companions, the holy brethren, the sanctified company. It is imperative that we should notice that, else we might fail to see the true bearing of the place Christ takes here. As I said, chapters iii., iv., v. and vi., and even chapter vii. to some extent, shew the priestly place Christ has taken in regard to our weakness here, not exactly sin, for sin is wilful in Hebrews

and only conducts to apostasy ; hence the saints are not viewed as being liable to sin, but they are viewed in the earlier chapters as being here in weakness, and the first aspect of Christ's priestly care for His saints is that He lifts them above the weakness. In all that is incidental to us as here, pressure of every kind, summed up (as we have often heard) in bereavement, the breaking of links here, or the failure as to our bodily health, or the exigency of contrary circumstances—the point is, are we with God in them? If we are, if we are not seeking our own will, all the priestly service of Christ is available for us. It is not that Christ alters our circumstances, but He has ability to lift us up to His own level. That is what Christ is effecting in the earlier part of the epistle, where you find Him who has gone through the heavens, and He has left the marks of His love on all that He has passed through. He has passed through as the high priest did in going into the holy place, and He is there to succour, and not only to succour, but to sympathise. Do we weigh it enough, that Christ sympathises with us? It is the beating of His heart as Man with ours. God does not sympathise as such, He compassionates ; but Christ entered into true human condition that He might feel with us. I can have the greatest concern for my fellow-saint who is in

evil circumstances, but if I have been in them and am out of them myself I can *feel with*, I can sympathise, and Christ *feels with*, and He lifts us above them. What for? That He may lift us into His circumstances; that is Hebrews. He takes us off our platform that He may lift us to His platform.

Now I would like to touch the side by which Christ is before the face of God in regard to taking us in as to priestly service. The first side must be known, however. If we have not known His sympathy, if we do not know His priestly grace to lift us to His level, we shall never be there according to God. Now the first covenant was made with Israel, and the result was complete breakdown; but before the breakdown came in God shewed to Moses a complete pattern of that which, in Christ, was under His eye and was to abide. Truly the breakdown had to come in, but it had not come in when God shewed the pattern to Moses. There is no breakdown in the Spirit, and I want to bring before you in this chapter the scene where there is no breakdown. You will see the importance of the new covenant coming in in the latter part of the chapter, because if the new scene beyond the breakdown comes before us we must be in suitability to it, and we cannot be in suitability in ourselves, everything must be of God. It all depends upon Him;

we have to come to an end of ourselves. We have to come to this—I can be nothing for God, but there is everything in God. It is all over on the line of “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not”—the death of Christ proved that; the old is disappearing. At the end of this chapter God pronounces the word “new,” and if God has said “new” it means that the old must go in me, in you, in creation. God has got what is new, entirely new, before Him. Christianity is what is new; it is the test of everything.

If that be so, we shall find that, first of all, a new order of priesthood comes into view, presented in type in Melchisedec, that mysterious personage, assimilated to the Son of God. Christ outside the failure and ruin has resources great enough to uphold God’s world, great enough to minister to all that belongs to it. We shall find also a new covenant, new worshippers and a new sanctuary; it is all living and real *now*, not simply in the future. We have come in this chapter to the chief point of the epistle—“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the *sum*”—it is the heading up, the climax. “We have such an high priest.” Remember, beloved fellow-saints, we are viewed here, not as connected any longer with our weakness, but with His strength. We are in connection with ‘Christ, the One who is there on our behalf ‘Such an high priest became *us*.’ Yes! It is.

the holy company, God's holy company, whose calling is so great that it needed such a High Priest to be for them. In the mind of God none less than such a High Priest would befit the holy brethren. These very chapters are to confirm in our souls the knowledge of the place in which He has put us in connection with His Son. Properly, He has called us to sonship, though that is not developed here. "The word of the swearing of the oath maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore."

"We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens." We are conducted in thought, at the very outset of this chapter, to God's presence; we are taken where we may survey things from God's standpoint. How do we do it? Well, in that way we have to abstract ourselves, we have to view ourselves as drawn aside from our circumstances and surroundings. God in His power once enabled a wicked man to be abstracted from things here. He can effect what He will, and by His sovereign power God once abstracted that very wicked man Balaam by a vision and a trance. Much more by His Holy Spirit can God abstract us, and make us see things from His standpoint. I refer to that particularly because there is a covert allusion here to Balaam's prophecy. He was taken up to the top of the rocks and saw Israel from God's side, and then

he describes their beauty and order. (Num. xxiv. 5, 6.) It was not that God was concerned with cedars and waters; they all figure what comes under God's eye in its moral beauty and order in Christ by the Spirit. If we see with God we shall view all that is of God; we shall see it according to its definite order and beauty outside the breakdown. Naturally we are so occupied with breakdown, even in the few of us who have the privilege of walking together. How much we see one another's faults! I have no doubt that those goodly tents of Jacob and tabernacles of Israel would have looked very different if Balaam could have gone in and out among them; he did presently, and he quickly enough knew how to drag the people down to his own level when he saw all that was going on in their midst. But he viewed them here from above, from God's standpoint; and he, though he failed, may well bring before us this—that we also should view things from God's standpoint. We shall not then be occupied with the failure in one another, or even in ourselves, but with what is of God there—with God's world. This is the effect of the New Covenant.

Now Christ is introduced in a twofold character, as Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. There are two distinct thoughts there, and I desire to present simply the Lord

Jesus according to them. I speak for a moment of the tabernacle. The tabernacle which God gave was no doubt intended to be a figure of that great world of blessedness which was going to be for ever under His eye in Christ, and which He was going to form for and according to His pleasure. It is boundless and limitless as the heart of God itself. I have no doubt that it compasses every family that is going to be blessed under God's hand in Christ; for of course God is not concerned merely with material things, but with living, moral realities,—living beings—and the tabernacle was intended to embrace the whole universe that God will bring in for His pleasure. Then there was one part of it, called the sanctuary, which particularly presented the place of association between Christ and His companions of to-day—the holiest. There Aaron and his sons were meant to enter and worship; as a matter of fact, they never did; failure came in on the first day. But Christ is Minister of the sanctuary as well as of the true tabernacle. It is curious that the quotation from Numbers xxiv, 5, 6, "as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted," was also rendered "as tabernacles which the Lord pitched." We come here to the reality of what was there shadowed forth, "the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man," to what is now under God's eye in its unfailing beauty

and order. That gives us a competent test for everything that lays claim to being of God here. If it has been pitched by Jehovah, it is of God ; if it bears marks of having been pitched by man, we can eschew it. It is a simple guide for the simplest of us—to see whether the tabernacle we have to do with, the religious order presented to us, has been pitched by man or by God. It is obvious that if there is anything of man in the way it has been set up, it is not of God.

I have no doubt that the tabernacle was properly pitched when the Spirit descended from above, as related in Acts ii. ; He pitched then the house of God, but, at the same time, it was the initiation of God's new world, of a limitless sphere of blessing. The Spirit had come down, on the ground of redemption, to bring in an unfailing order of things that was to be for God. Now we have got One who is Minister of that order of things, not only in the broad aspect as the tabernacle, but in its inner view as the holy place. Aaron was, of course, minister of the old tabernacle ; here he is entirely eclipsed by Christ, who comes in as the official Minister of that glorious order of things that is before God in Himself and in His saints, as "all of one" with Him. The great care of Christ in that way is to take in hand the holy vessels of divine service. The first tabernacle was filled with holy vessels of

divine service; in the next chapter we find a great many of them enumerated, and they all have an answer at the present moment in Christ and the holy brethren who are connected with Him, and I think the thought of the Minister of the sanctuary is One who can preserve the holy vessels and the holy places clean and fit for the service of God. We get a similar idea in 2 Timothy, where the distinction is drawn between man's tabernacle—the "great house," and what God has pitched: "the sure foundation of God stands." When that distinction takes effect in our souls, so that we stand apart from iniquity (what man has pitched), then we find this: "He shall be a vessel unto honour, meet for the Master's use." How will He use us? In service Godward. Here He is the Minister of holy places, or holy things, or holy vessels. What are they? I believe they are His holy brethren, His called companions of the present day; they all set forth living realities. Christ can lift you and me (who a little while ago were sinners in this world) into His own company, and form and fashion and mould us there so that He can use us in His own service, and then His great care is to keep us clean and ready for the service of God. He undertakes that, and I think we feel the need of it. To be practical: one comes to a meeting, half distracted it may be—there has been all

the rush and worry of business or domestic life, so that perhaps there is half an hour before one can get at all right ; all the pressure has to be got over. Well, Christ's service is to hold us free from distraction : He takes up the holy vessels to keep them clean and ready for the service of God. That is a great thing, for God *will* be served. He has laid it down in His word that He will be served : " Let my son Israel go, that he may serve me." I do not mean service in the way simply of preaching the gospel. That is one side of service, and I think it flows from this ; but God will be served in the way of worship. One often feels as if He did not get much. If we look at the side of the poverty of our worship, the little we have to bring, we have to confess that there is very little for God. We want to turn from that side to this, *that God is efficiently served*. I mean this, that it is by Christ. Christ has taken up a place to-day of service Godward, and *He* serves God ; all is in His hands. It is not a question of my being a " tiny vessel," but that Christ is the great vessel. He is the One in whom everything is sustained Godward. I would like to bring before you the greatness of the place Christ has as Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, and He is that in such sort that there is no breakdown or failure in God's service. God is efficiently served because the One who has charge of

the sanctuary, the One who is Minister of it, is Christ, and on man's behalf He stands before God. If we laid hold of that it would lift us above the meetings, whether they are poor or not. What is under God's eye is Christ, and connected with Christ are the holy brethren, apart from the weakness and failure here. I can well remember how often that chapter used to be read in the Old Testament about the first-fruits (Deut. xxvi. 1-5, &c.); that is right enough. In one sense we do bring the firstfruits when we come together, that is, Christ; but the point is, that we are not content to leave that relative outside that is always a hindrance, "our father the Syrian." He represents our old condition, what we were, not as connected with Christ, as holy brethren, but afar from God. We cannot afford to bring the Syrian in, he spoils everything. We must view ourselves here as abstracted from our condition and circumstances. It is Christ who is before us, and Christ is before God, and God is efficiently served.

The word minister here has a very large application. It is a peculiar word; it carries with it the thought of a public, official place. We have the word in its application to service, that is, "liturgy;" and so the word here is properly "liturgist"—one who takes up an official, public place. I admit Christ has not got

that place at the moment. There is no public worship to-day. The idea prevails in Christendom of public worship, but it is as yet too early for that, for Christ is rejected here. There can be no public worship where Christ is rejected. There is going to be public worship, for that is what will mark God's world in a coming day. When He ushers in His day there will be public worship. Read all the last psalms of the fifth book. "Let everything that hath breath praise the name of the Lord." Will that be public worship? Yes. Why? Because Christ will not be rejected then; He will be in honour. Now Christ has already the place of Minister of worship, and He is going to have it publicly, too. When God's world is brought into display God will be publicly and efficiently served, but by Christ. He is going to uphold that great scene of worship pictured in the end of Psalm xxii., "All the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee." Read the last psalms, every one beginning and ending with Hallelujah—"Praise ye the Lord." Everything is called upon to join in that grand chorus of worship to Jehovah. Is that scene going to be self-supporting? No, it will all be held in the hands of a Man, and that Man God's blessed Son, Christ. He is great enough to be set in that glorious, official position in which He can support the magnificence of that hymn of worship to God

right through the ages. He will then be seen in His true character of Minister of public worship. To-day *we* know Him in that character, but it is hidden ; it is all before God in secret ; it is worship in spirit and in truth. And if we know Him in that character, we shall be able to pass in spirit with Him into all the breadth of what He upholds to-day before the face of God. We have but to lay hold of Him in the glory of His Person and in the greatness of the official position He occupies before God. He holds that official position, not in any coldness of office, but in affection. As a Priest all His affections as Man are engaged, and then He sets all our affections in motion. It would give us great confidence in our meetings to know this, that God is efficiently served. Christ takes up your poor heart and mine, and He can form and fashion and fill and fit them for the service of God. So it goes on to say here : "Every high priest . . . somewhat also to offer." What has Christ to offer ? I believe He offers to God the affections of the holy brethren, affections which He Himself has formed. He forms His holy brethren for the service of God. When Christ was on earth, there was one whose action brings before us anticipatively the beauty of this position—Mary in John xii. We see there, if only in pattern, how Christ, as Minister of the sanctuary, could take her up as a holy vessel—

though nothing in herself—and could fit her to come into the worship of God, and in that way I think the alabaster box of ointment shewed the measure of praise which Christ could draw from her heart. She herself disappears as an individual ; she is here a pattern of the worshipping company. At the end of this chapter we find that Christ has ability, as Minister of the sanctuary, to take up the worship of the hearts of the ministering company (as set forth in the alabaster box of ointment), to present all to God—all of the sweetest fragrance before God. We have the poor always with us, but there are moments when we can afford to be abstracted from occupation with the poor, to let the worship and adoration of our hearts flow out to God through Christ.

Think of the greatness of His position Godward, that He can uphold the worship of our hearts ! I do not think Mary was occupied with her poorness ; she was lifted outside herself, and Christ and God in Christ was the one Object ; everything was surrendered that it might be expended on Him, and He was great enough to take it all up.

Now why does the new covenant come in at the end of the chapter ? It is because if we are to be put in touch with a scene that is so great as this we must be formed in suitability for it. That work must be of God ; it can be nothing

in ourselves, we cannot work ourselves up to it. We might see the level of it, and determine to be "up to date" in our meetings, and not go on a sort of low level. Very well—that only means confusion. That is the old order, of what we *ought* to be. That is near "disappearing," and to bring that in now spells disaster. How many times we have tried it! We have felt things are not up to the level at which they ought to be, and that we must just raise the tone a little! That is simply Sinai—what we ought to be for God, but what comes in here is what *God can be for us*: "I will"—all is of God, that we may be brought into the conscious knowledge of Himself. It is that, and that only, from which worship can spring, and in which we may be suitable and at home in that glorious scene into which He would conduct us. That is why the new covenant comes in: the old one was ineffective, and God found fault with it. It was not efficient to lead men into the service of God. It failed because men were on the line of what they could be to God; but what a comfort to let all that side go!—to place ourselves unreservedly in the hands of Christ, as Minister of the sanctuary, that He may do what He will for us and with us. Our responsibility is to be separate for Him; His glorious privilege to take us up as vessels "meet for the Master's use," He knows what

to do with them. Our privilege is to surrender ourselves into His hands.

Now the end of this chapter tells us how we are formed for the enjoyment of and entrance into this holy scene. First of all there must be forgiveness: "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." God says: I have met all that in atonement through the death of Christ. If Christ has taken His seat on high, having made purgation of sins, it is the guarantee that God will remember them no more. When a Sovereign ascends the throne there is usually (in the case of political offenders at least) what is called an amnesty granted; that means a "not-remembering-any-more," and that is what is used here, though it is a still stronger word. That is the effect of Christ having taken His place at the right hand of God. Do you know God's amnesty, God's no-more-remembering of sins? But then there is another side. God comes in to teach us, and how we need it! He teaches us line upon line, and what is the force of His teaching? That we should come to the consciousness of Himself as our God, not simply as our Saviour, but to the conscious knowledge of Himself in the enjoyment of our souls. Looking forward to the future, we have: "I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them." It is Christ written there, and to-day in anticipation Christ is formed in

the affections of our hearts by His Spirit. That is, we are taught to love Christ, and if so, we appreciate what is of Christ. And what is the effect? We know God consciously, and that cannot be taken from us.

I desire to shew you God's way of working. When He sets out to teach people, with whom does He start? The lowest form! "For all shall know me, from *the little one* among them to the great one." That is where God starts—with the little one. Nobody need be left out where God is left free to work.

None of His own need despair of knowing the blessedness of Christ as presented in this chapter. God has said "new;" the old has disappeared from His eye; then why not from yours and mine? If we accept His amnesty and surrender to His teaching, the old order will disappear from our eye too. We shall be able to let the old go, and to take up in conscious suitability our glorious place with Christ, the Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

