

THE
OBJECT AND CHARACTER
OF
TRUE SERVICE.

MARK XIV. 9.

BY
JOHN ALFRED TRENCH.

Third Edition, Revised.

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OBJECT AND CHARACTER
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“WHERESOEVER this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her” (Mark xiv. 9).

HAVE any of you, beloved in the Lord, been led to ask the reason of this word of the Lord ; and to enquire into the connection between this woman’s act, and the preaching of the gospel throughout the world ? I think we see this very clearly, when we remember God’s ultimate aim in causing the testimony of His grace to be rendered to us. We know the *immediate* result, for the conscience that has been awakened to the sense of its need ; the cross of Christ is

presented to it, where the righteousness of God has rested in the judgment due to sin, and “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. v. 1). Much indeed remains still to be told of *present* access to and standing in the divine favour; of the joy of *hope* that looks out from this stand-point, and fastens itself on the glory of God, ere we turn to our path of trial in the world; of joy, in the very trials, too, because of the rich experience learned of God in them; Himself—the climax of our joy. (V. 11.) There is in the gospel, what we have been saved from; but there is also what we have been saved into, even till our hearts find their home in the Father’s house, “accepted in the Beloved.” A divine mystery of love, too, has still to be disclosed to us there. There are counsels of God for the glory and joy of Christ,

eternal counsels hid from all other ages, but now made known to us, in which we, too, have our part and interest, as given with all that are Christ's to Him, to be His Church, His Body, His Bride.

What rich revelations are these, beloved, of the love of God! And yet, there is that which goes beyond them all, in the object of God in communicating them to us. He would make Christ known to us according to His own delight in Him. How rich the grace that has not only saved us from Hell, but that would now introduce us into communion with the very joys of God! For the Lord Jesus, who has become precious to us, is the eternal joy of God. Never until salvation was fully known, could our hearts have been free for occupations such as these. But now, that salvation is ours in Christ (and far more than ever thought

could have conceived), God would have us enter into His estimate of Christ. He would lead us into divine intelligence of His intrinsic worth and excellency, that losing self and all beside, in contemplation of Christ, we may wonder, worship, and adore Him. God will have it so in heaven. Then, perfectly, the gospel will have accomplished the object for which it was sent forth.

We see it so in the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Are the redeemed out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation, seen in the innermost circle round the throne? (Ch. v.) The central object is "a Lamb, as it had been slain." Every eye is fixed, every heart occupied with Him; crowns are cast at His feet, harps tuned in His praise. Jesus is still their one-absorbing thought, their endless theme throughout eternity.

What were they once? What were we? "Dead in trespasses and sins"; "alienated from the life of God;" "without Christ," or hope! But now, "made nigh by the blood" of that slain One. Brought into the deepest secrets of the heart of God, even into His own estimate of His Son. Thus the object of God is attained—others with Him have known, loved, and prized His well-beloved, so as to count Him the joy of all joys, the very heaven of their heaven. Sinners of earth have been brought into unison with the mind of heaven and of God. Who more fit to lead the richest praise of heaven, and to *raise* the note, "Thou art worthy," to be taken up by angels and the universe in eternal song? The rich and glorious monotony of heaven will be *Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!*

This, then, beloved fellow-servants

of the Lord, being the aim and desire of God in the gospel, have we sympathy with God, as we preach it? Is our object to make known the Lord Jesus in all the varied charms and excellencies of His person? Is it to present Him that He may be owned as "the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely?" Is this the *object* of our service? Are His glory, beauty, and attractions ever before our own eyes?

This seems to be the connection of thought in the Lord's mind at this time. There is a supper in the house of a poor leper, and we find Jesus there. He is the Son whom the Father loved from eternity. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here He is amongst us, sitting at meat in the house of

Simon the leper at Bethany. Ah! "He is despised and rejected of men;" men see *no beauty* that they should desire Him. The chief priests and scribes were just now seeking how they might take Him by craft, and put Him to death. Such was *man's* estimate of Christ. What a wound to the heart of God! God said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." But we—yes, we all once among the number—"hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." Our eyes were indeed holden by sin and unbelief that we should not know Him.

While men thus conspired against Him, there was one at least in that house who entered in some measure into God's mind about His Christ. While others were occupied with the joy of sitting and eating with Him,

happy in their nearness to Him (and well they might be), there was one who rose higher than all the rest; Mary—for it was no other, as John xii. tells us—was occupied with Jesus *for His own sake*. Her *previous training* had led to this. She had been found sitting at the feet of Jesus, hearing His word, while others were busied with serving Him” (Luke x. 38). Mary had chosen “that good part which shall not be taken away from her”—she was occupied with HIMSELF. Already, on earth, she had come to the springs of the joy of heaven. Jesus was even now to her, her *all*. The feet of Jesus had been Mary’s school, and there she had been learning to enter into what He was in Himself. Her one lesson was *Jesus*, in His own intrinsic value. Her eyes began to open to His matchless beauty and attractions, till at last

she became dead to all other. In the scene before her Jesus is her only interest, her one absorbing thought. She forgets the guests, the supper table, all, in adoration of *Him*. She seems to say, as she gazes upon Him, "I am sick of love." No *words* can express the sense of His worth, till at last, in divinely given intelligence, she breaks the alabaster box of ointment of spikenard, very precious, and pours it on His head. And thus in the silent language of a heart too full for utterance, she ascribes to Him, as alone worthy, all that is counted costly and precious on earth. Precious intelligence in the thoughts of God, which had its full value for the heart of Christ, however the rest misinterpreted the act!

It is in human nature to love to be *known* and understood. This desire is

found in Him, the very perfection of manhood. Earlier in His ministry on earth, when the cities, wherein most of His mighty works were done, repented not, He was constrained to say, "No man knoweth the Son but the Father" (Matt. xi. 27). Misunderstood and unknown by men, He rests with comfort in the thought, "My Father knows Me," and lays His head upon the bosom of His Father's love.

Here was one who, taught of God, seemed to understand something of His perfections, as the Father delighted in them. She began *to enter into His thoughts of His beloved Son*. In secret with Jesus, walking in communion with Him, she had learnt them and gained capacity to enter into them, until no human words will suffice to express what she had found of intrinsic worth in Him.

The ointment poured on His head is just the necessary relief her heart seeks, bursting with the sense of what *He is*. Thus she adores and worships Him. And, O beloved ! had not God His joy, in this her appreciation of the Lord Jesus ? Indeed, indeed He had. It is His will "that men should *honour* the Son even as they honour the Father." He looks for this very result of the gospel in our hearts. He says, "Unto you that believe *He is the preciousness* : " and thus it was with Mary.

Oh, how much apparent zeal, activity, and earnestness, there may be, which does not spring from the heart's appreciation of Christ at all ! This was what was lacking in Martha. She was busied apparently *for* Jesus, making ready for Him, serving Him. But what does Jesus say ? All service has its value in His eye, according to the

measure in which the heart is engaged with Himself, as its first object. Now, "Martha was cumbered about much serving." She was putting her *service* in the place of Jesus. He loves her too well to consent to her heart being thus engrossed. *He* wanted her to enjoy Himself. Mary entered thus into His mind; she felt He cared most of all for her heart, and gave it Him. If Martha seeks to distract Mary too, *she* chooses rather to sit still at His feet and listen, as He delights to reveal Himself to her; and Jesus stamps Mary's choice with His approval. "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Beloved, in this day of general activity, is it not well to judge our-

selves in the presence of God, as to how far our hearts are *with Him* in it? Are we not often (by our very service) drawn away from the place where we ought to be—at the feet of Christ? Is not this the secret of *want of power*, and constant failure?

The Lord Jesus has not been the first object of the thing undertaken, or the word spoken; and then, too, it has lost all value in His eyes. Let us ask, then, Are we taken up and occupied with *Himself*? Is there not often but a very partial surrender of the heart to Him, though at the same time there may be much going to and fro in service? What He prizes is a heart thoroughly devoted to Him. He cannot be content with a part of the heart—He wants *the whole*. And, oh, if He cared to shed His blood to win and make them His—all worthless as

they are—shall *we* refuse to give them to Him? She surrendered *herself* to be His alone. If He fills the heart of God, is He not worthy and able to fill ours? Christ is the central object of the thoughts of God. When He is of ours, all is in its right place and order. It was so with Paul. He had Christ for the absorbing object of his heart—“To me to live is Christ;” and all else was as dross and dung (Phil. i. 21, and iii. 8).

But am I saying a word *against* service, in all this, beloved? No; but only seeking so to order it, that it may be acceptable to the Lord. A heart that, with God, makes Christ its paramount object, has the spring and power of service indeed; nor will it be found lacking in sympathy with the thoughts of God, as the Master's words ring in our ears—“Go ye into all the

world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark xvi. 15). Is it possible that any of us are so far removed from fellowship with God, as not to have the service of seeking to win souls for Christ ever dear to us? Let us work, beloved, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work. But the most blessed service has its snares. Let us beware lest we should be engaged in telling others of Him, while all the time our hearts are cold to His love. Christ is not *first*: and instead of self-judgment that it is so, and confession, so that communion might be restored, the heart (feeling the distance) runs restlessly into increased measure of service; but this only tends to maintain the distance by cloaking the soul's real condition. Martha found a snare in her very eagerness to get ready the house for

the Lord. Mary, occupied with Himself alone, to the exclusion of all other interests, when the time had come, knew how to render the most exquisitely grateful service ever rendered to Him on earth.

And what made it so grateful to the Lord? It sprang from a heart engaged with Himself: and the very least thing thus done, with Him as its object, is pleasing in His sight; if it be but a cup of cold water given to a disciple in His name. Beloved, a solemn day is coming, when all that we have *seemed to do for Christ* will be tested: and the test will be, what place did He occupy in the affections and thoughts of the servant?

Here was where Martha failed, and Mary gained His smile and approval. Her heart filled with Christ, her service was the expression of it, and thus par-

took of the character of worship. This ever marks true service. Thus she knew how to do the *right* thing, in the *right* place, and way, and won those precious words from Jesus, "She hath done what she could ; she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying."

Nor will He have her disturbed. "Let her alone ; why trouble ye her ? she hath wrought a good work on me." True, there was not one there who could estimate this service but He to whom it was done. Judas may account it waste ; so may the other disciples ; but Mary was in communion with the Lord's mind. He was pleased : it was enough.

Beloved, how humbling ought this false judgment of the disciples to be to us ! They would not have counted it waste if it had been done to the poor ;

they did so account that which sprang from entire devotedness to Christ. This was human nature! And thus it is still. Whom does the world applaud? Those who will spend their time in benevolent and philanthropic schemes; while it counts him a fool who gives up anything for Christ. What is "waste" in the world's estimate, because done to Christ, is precious to God. Mary's action was but the *kind* of response He looks for from everyone brought to know Him.

But to have a heart thus free to be taken up with Christ, there must first be deep, settled rest as to every question of sin. The cross of Christ provides for this, for the believer sees not only his *sins* there, put away for ever, but *himself*. There is the end of all that *I am*—judged, condemned, crucified with Christ, and buried: "There is therefore now

no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 1). Until the work of Christ is thus fully apprehended, self is still before the thoughts to be improved, amended, or got rid of, and it is not to be wondered at, that the heart fails to rise to God's thoughts about Christ.

Others again have got beyond this. They have seen the end of themselves in the Cross, and rejoice in the knowledge that life, righteousness, and acceptance are theirs in the risen Christ. Oh, how blessed it was, beloved, when we first made discovery that He was thus ours; and we were able to sing, as often still—

"Now I have found a friend,
Jesus is mine."

This must have been something of Lazarus' happy experience, as he sat at the table with Jesus. So it was with

the bride in the "Song of Songs," when she says, "My beloved is *mine*, and I am His;" and thus comforts herself, as well as she may, "until the day break, and the shadows flee away." Observe, the *first* thought is "He is mine." This is her own most blessed interest in Christ; still it is herself that is first. Do not many of us, beloved, get thus far and no further? We rest contented and happy in what we have in Christ: and there is no progress in the knowledge of what *Christ is in Himself*, as God would have it.

But we mark this progress very blessedly in the case before us. Later on in the Song (chap. vi. 3), we find that she can put *His interests first*. *Now*, she says, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." The *first* thought is His possession of her, though there is yet room for thoughts of what she

possesses. But in chap vii. 10, we find she has forgotten herself, in the far higher thought of His interest in her. She has lost herself in His love ; and if she adds aught to "I am my beloved's," it is only to speak again of what she knows of His thoughts, "His desire is towards me." How blessed, beloved, to be able to lose ourselves in the amazing discovery of what we are to Him.

But Mary reaches higher than all this in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. And shall *we* be satisfied with anything short of what our sister has attained before us? It is blessed to know that He is ours ; more blessed still to know the wondrous place He has given us in His heart ; but this ought only to lead into a deeper apprehension of Him who so loves us.

This I find also in the experience of the Bride in Canticles. For in chap.

v. 9, when challenged, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" she answers, "He is the chiefest among ten thousand," and then goes on to tell, not of the blessings she has received from Him, nor even of His interest in her, but of all His own varied attractions, until at last she says "*He is altogether lovely?*"

Thus, beloved, let each of us follow on to know the Lord, in the peerless excellency and glory of His person; till we can say, not because she said it, nor because of the report of others, but as the result of our *own experience*, "He is the chiefest." It is for this we have been drawn to Him; that *knowing* Him, and entering into the perfection of all that He is, we may thus have communion with the Father; who so rests, delights, and finds all His joy in the Son of His love.

There is another notable instance of one who thus had sympathy with the interests of God ; and who is therefore distinguished by the Lord's marked approval. In that day of the passing out of the old dispensation, previous to the ushering in of the new, Jerusalem and the temple were *still* the centre of God's thoughts. She of whom I speak knew it ; and hence, when the house of God needed repair, the poor widow of her want cast her two mites into the treasury ; and this was "all that she had, all her living" (Mark xii. 44).

How beautiful was this entering into God's thoughts ! What a surrender of every interest of her own for God's, when, unmindful of her poverty, she gave her little all, in the furtherance of God's object.

This again in its place and measure was precious to the Lord. He draws

the attention of the disciples to her, for in *His eyes* she had “cast in *more than they all.*” What, then, is God’s object *now*—shall we not ask? We know it, for He has “made known to us the mystery of His will.” Is it not the glory of Christ in His body the Church, formed for Him out of the materials of sinners found dead in sins, to be “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all?”

If this, then, is the present counsel of God for the glory and joy of the Lord Jesus, does it occupy its proper place in our hearts and service? Are we willing to throw ourselves, our substance, our all, into the line of its accomplishment? To one who has intelligence of it, this will be the aim of his service as surely as it is true. The world will be pleased with what proposes good to man, and will estimate all else as worthless, God will accept

that which has the glory of Christ for its object: only then is it of any value with Him. Is not the smile of God's approval enough? One that walks in the consciousness of it, can afford to despise alike the frown and flattery of this world. Beloved, let us beware of the world's smile. Its frown were safer by far. We have now "to please but *One*." Let the "She hath done what she could" of Christ, be enough for us.

"To me to live is Christ." Let Christ be then the controlling object of our life, in the power of the Spirit of God. There is no rest while the heart is divided between Christ and self, or the world, or our friends, or our brethren. The joys of God are entered into by the one that will make Christ, and Christ alone, his object.

Let us then, beloved, be found, like

Mary, at the Master's feet. Let us listen to the voice of the Lord Jesus, as it is still heard in His Word; and as we are thus occupied, the Spirit of God will delight to unfold more and more His preciousness to us. It is His office and joy to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, until our hearts are won to be His alone.

Alas! do any say, "I have not been entering thus into the preciousness of Christ—my heart is cold to His love, and insensible to His grace." Do not dwell on this: your heart will never be warmed by its own coldness. If it is cold, I shall never grow warmer by dwelling on the *fact* of the frost and snow around. Nay, I shall only get colder still, until I draw near to the source of heat. O beloved! is not the source of all light and heat for us *the love of Christ*? Draw near to His own

heart. It is the place He gives, and delights that you should take. Lay your head upon His bosom. Your response to His love may be feeble, but His is not measured by ours. He does not change; the *measure* of His love to *each* is the Father's to Him. Did John call himself the disciple whom Jesus loved? Yes; but it was only that, by faith he *took the place* Jesus had given to the rest as well as to him—the very place He wants *you* to take, as though His love belonged to nobody else besides. Such love must melt the very coldest heart that *believes* it. Then Christ will naturally be first in every thought. He will be the absorbing object of the mind. Thus it was with Mary; and this was why her service was so grateful to Jesus. It sprang from a heart that was engaged with Him, in the knowledge she had gained of His own intrinsic

excellency. It was of the *order of result* that God looks for, in causing the gospel to be proclaimed; and hence, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." Soon, beloved, we shall see Him face to face. Then shall we know as we are known. There will be no power then, that could any more divide our affections with Him. Service will have no snares then, for God's object will be the *only* object of every heart *there*.

Let us seek that it may be so with each of us *here*. The Lord grant it!

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