

THE EXALTED CHRIST

Our Sanctification with Him
in His Exaltation

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CHAPTER THREE

“THE ETERNAL PURPOSE WHICH HE PURPOSED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD”

“I doubt not through the ages on a Increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.”
- Lord Tennyson

The thoughts of men may be widened, but the thoughts of the Lord are not widened by the process of the suns. He has from the beginning of the world hid all things in Christ. His will is in Himself that wonderful will of God, that blessed will of God, that mysterious will of God, His own purpose which shall stand. And it is that Christ may have the pre-eminence, and be exalted. Let our little purposes and plans be all lost sight of, and merged and brought into captivity and to obedience to Him who **“worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

Sir Arthur Blackwood, K.C.B.
(Last words at Mildmay)

“That in all things He might have the pre-eminence” (Colossians 1:18).

“That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth . . . That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:10; 2:7).

I TAKE as my starting-point for this Bible talk the Epistle to the Ephesians the third chapter and the 11th and 12th verses: **“According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.”**

We are thankful to know that our Father has a purpose, and that that purpose is ensphered in Jesus Christ our Lord, so that, as John puts it in the book of Revelation, there is a book which, though sealed with seven seals, is delivered to the Lamb that He may open it seal by seal. The ultimate end of our Father’s purpose, so far as we can discern it by the light of revelation, is disclosed to us in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians in the 15th chapter, in the 24th verse, **“Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.”**

The kingdom which God gave to man in paradise was niched from man by man's great foe, the devil, and though God had made man to be the king, the vice-regent over the earth, the crown was torn from his brow and his dominion trampled underfoot. And for long it seemed as if Satan were to continue to hold the empire which he had unrighteously obtained; but at last the Son of man appeared and in the temptation of the wilderness, in the garden of Gethsemane, on the Cross, and upon the Resurrection morning He showed that God in man was stronger than the sovereignty of the devil, and that comparatively speaking the empire of Satan over men, over the earth, and the material elements was to be a thing of a short duration.

This wonderful Saviour of ours has already defeated Satan, and broken his power; and as the ages go on, the meaning of that conquest and victory is becoming more apparent.

Our Lord is putting down, one by one, the great foes of man. The last enemy shall yet be destroyed. And when Jesus Christ has asserted His supremacy over the entire domain of human life, of man, and of the earth, then He shall deliver up the kingdom to God even the Father. It is certain that there is an infinite beauty in thinking and in knowing that the consummation of all things is to be in the kingdom of our Father God. But though that be the ultimate out working of God's purpose in Christ, I am very anxious not to lose myself or my time in these generalities, however sublime they be, because when you go from this Conference you will need to have for your own life words that will empower you to live and work for God.

The eternal purpose of God, which must certainly include us all, must be claimed by a living faith. This comes out clearly in the text, which we will read again. In the epistle to the Ephesians, the 3rd chapter, you find it written, **"According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him."**

Now why, in the same sentence, does the apostle join the outworking of God's eternal purpose with our access to Him in boldness and confidence? Is it not remarkable, when you consider it, that the apostle turns from the vast extent of the purpose of God to consider the small circle of human life? It is as wonderful a comparison as to compare the orbit of the earth with the circle of a gnat's eye. Why does the apostle turn from the general to the particular, from the vast sweep of God's purpose to our little life? Well, partly because God's purpose will only be fulfilled through individuals, and partly for another reason, to which I desire to bring you.

I want you to see, in fact, that the purpose of God, whilst it is secure of being fulfilled, yet waits for you to claim it.

First, Claim its realization by a daily faith, and you will find how real and easy faith becomes when it is based upon the eternal purpose of God concerning you.

I do not wonder that some people complain that they are unable to believe; it is because they do not apprehend God's purpose; but directly you apprehend God's purpose you have access with boldness and confidence to claim it.

Now let us see how this works out.

Take, for instance, the Epistle to the Ephesians; and first, as concerns the Blamelessness of our Character. Is there one here that does not want to live the blameless life? Do you not sigh often again for the lily of a blameless, spotless character? Is there a single soul that has seen the King who does not sigh over the impure lip? Is there one who has ever thought of the pellucid water of life without desiring to be a pure vessel, so as not to contaminate it when passed to another? You long to be holy and without blame, and yet very often it seems like the vision of a night that mocks you, or like a mirage upon the desert sand, that dies away when it is approached.

But turn to Ephesians 1:4. He chose us in Christ **“before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”**

The apostle takes us back to the eternal ages before a seraph flamed, before a cherub loved, before the heavens or the earth were made. You who believe in Christ were chosen in Him; that is, God chose Christ and all who shall have affinity to Him that affinity being shown by their faith. And God chose such, you amongst their number if you believe in Christ, that you should be holy and without blemish. Oh, weary heart, travel back to the origin of the river, away in the heart of those eternal ages, and see how it has been flowing down through them to bear you upon its broad bosom into a blameless life; and when you have once understood that God’s election means that you should be holy and without blame, then remember that your faith may come into the very presence of God with boldness and confidence, to claim that His election shall be made a living fact in your experience.

Secondly, work out that same thought with regard to the Consciousness of Sonship.

In Ephesians 1:5 you are told that you have been predestinated unto the adoption of sons. Some of you may not have the joy of assurance. You do not realize yourselves to be sons and daughters of God. You have not got the peace of conscious acceptance, and yet you cling to Christ. But, remember, since you have been foreordained unto the adoption of sons, you have therefore a perfect right to go into the presence of God and claim that the Spirit of adoption should witness with your spirit that you are a child of God.

Consider a third illustration *With regard to the Sympathy of Jesus.*

In Ephesians 1:10, you are told and I use the Greek word here that it is God’s purpose to head up all things in Christ, that He may be the apex, the climax, the Head of all things and of all men who believe.

Perhaps you have been longing fervently for sympathy, but just so soon as you see God has constituted Jesus Christ as your Head, forthwith, by a living faith, you will claim that all that the head is to the body Jesus will be to you. You will claim that as the head sympathizes with bodily pain, so you may be conscious of the sympathy of Jesus; and as the head impels the members to obey, so your life shall yield fealty to Christ.

Fourthly, with regard to Possession by Christ and the Infilling by the Spirit.

You long for a Pentecost. You know that the blessing of Pentecost was that men were filled with the Spirit. If ever a man has longed to be filled with the Spirit of God it is you. You have heard of happy souls who, by the grace of God, have stood beneath the open heavens, and the dove has flown to their hearts and the voice of God has declared them His beloved children, but with all your nights of prayer and days of fasting you have never yet realized what it was to be in-filled with the Holy Ghost and possessed of God.

Yet if you look at that text you will see in Ephesians 1:11, “**In whom also we have obtained an inheritance.**” Now an inheritance is that which you occupy and possess. If it is a house, you live in it; if it is an estate, you cultivate it, and you leave no single acre uncared for. So that God’s eternal purpose was that you should be His estate, His house; that you should be filled by Himself, as the waters fill the ocean bed.

The Holy Ghost at Pentecost was given to you because you were represented in Christ in His ascension, and if you were wise you would now claim Him from the presence of your Father. You need not plead with Him. You need not spend a day or a night of prayer, but take the purpose of God in your hand, and go to Him and say, “My Father, I find it is Thy purpose that I, Thy child, should become Thine estate. I am like very poor land, therefore put all into me that Thou wouldst take out, I am not a tenantable house, but put me in repair. Come and live in me, God, by the Holy Ghost, and let there be no cranny or corner of my life unfilled.” Plead the purpose of God about yourself, and you will plead with confidence and boldness.

Take a fifth illustration, as it concerns Our daily Walk.

Take Ephesians 2:10. Is there a soul that does not want to do the best work possible? How may we do it? The text begins by saying that “**we are His workmanship.**” In the Greek word it is “We are God’s poem,” as if God were a poet, and He were making one great poem the church and just as in some of Browning’s poetry the conception is obscure, and it takes two or three readings before we can understand the rhythm, the measure, the meaning, so we may have to wait before we see God’s thought in the church.

But there is a rhythm and a majesty and a beauty in it: somehow we rhyme, somehow each one contributes to the cadence. We are God’s poem. But we have been “**created in Christ Jesus.**”

You were created a new creature at the Cross when first you found Christ. Ah, yes; but you were created in Christ Jesus ages before that, when in the purpose of God, you were created in Christ unto good works.

In that far away eternity, God also sketched out the path of your good works. He prepared the good works for you to walk in. “**Created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God before prepared that we should walk in them.**” Every path begins at the Cross and ends at the Golden Gate. But they intersect - they are devious, or lonesome. Now there is a bit of sward or moss, a stretch alongside a river; just now a steep climb up the hill Difficulty, and presently the Delectable Mountains and the land of Beulah.

But whatever path you are treading, believe that you were created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God before prepared for you to walk in. And if you were wise, you would not scheme this or the other, and say, "I will do this in imitation of another," or, "I will work out a new plan which I have devised," but every day you would walk with God, and as you opened your eyes to consciousness you would cry, "My God, I want to walk with Thee to-day in the good works which Thou hast prepared for me to occupy."

When once we see that there is a purpose of God in our life it makes prayer so easy! We have access with boldness and confidence upon the groundwork of God's purpose for us. "Do as Thou hast said."

Notice those last words of the passage, "**boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.**" People do not seem to understand the difference between praying and believing. Our lives are full of prayer; but, alas! there is too little of this faith.

What is faith? Well, you may put it thus: Faith is the power to claim that God's purpose shall be realized, and the power to take the grace that shall enable you to realize it.

Oh, Christian people, have not some of us made a terrible mistake, in always praying as if God were unwilling to give, spending days and nights in agony, as if to wring from God some boon from His reluctant hand, when, in point of fact, our God is like the sea that seethes all down a line of wall, hungry to find the aperture through which to pour itself into lough or loch?

We forget that the very desire for God has been implanted by God, and that He is not likely to disappoint the desire, the appetite, which He Himself has created. We forget that all around in Nature there is an abundant supply of food before the babe or the insect or the fish or the young lion requires it. And so our appetite or desire is but the reflection flung upon the clear waters of our heart from the purpose of God which is hanging over us.

We need therefore to understand more clearly the purpose of God for us, and then there will be a definiteness and a meaning and a reality in our prayer which will make our prayer-time full of a new interest.

A man said to me the other day when I was talking like this, "But, sir, if we were to begin to pray like that, would it not make our times of prayer much shorter, and limit the hours that we spend before God?" I replied, "Certainly not. We might ask for fewer things, and ask more definitely; but we should have to spend quite as long within our prayer-closet, because our hearts would be overflowing with gratitude and thanksgiving and adoration, and with the expressions of our love."

I leave this with you.

God has a purpose for every one of us. God's eternal purpose is to do the best for you that He can. God has put you just where you are, because there you have the best chance of realizing His purpose. His purpose is contained in promise.

Hence, if you get the promises of God you get the purposes of God. Get then back to God's purpose. Deal with Him about the things that He Himself has purposed and pledged. Do not pray for them as if He were unwilling to grant them; but go into His presence with boldness and confidence, and say, "My Father, Thou hast said this or that of me, for I am in Christ, and I do now claim as Thy child, standing in Him, that Thou shouldst do this or the other for me."

And when you have definitely asked, believe that God will be as good as His promise, arise from your knees, and go down to your daily warfare or work, and as you go down, keep saying to yourself, "Glory be to God. I do not feel; I have no rapture; I have no consciousness of reception; but I know that God has done what I claimed, because He has said that He would, and I am going along my path reckoning that He is faithful."

You will find that at that moment when you claimed you took in a cargo which will stand you in good stead on your voyage, and that when you come to your duties, your difficulties, or your trials, there will be a consciousness of power, of contentment, and of wealth which you had not known before. Thus believe in the eternal purpose of God, and go into His presence with boldness and confidence by faith in Jesus Christ.

My life is part of a Divine Plan. As a mother desires the best possible for her babes, bending over the cradle which each occupies in turn, so does God desire to do His best for us all. He hates nothing that He has made; but has a fair ideal for each, which He desires to accomplish in us with perfect love. But there is no way of transferring it to our actual experience, except by the touch of His Spirit within, and the education of our circumstances without.

God does not show us the whole plan of our life at a burst, but unfolds it to us bit by bit. At the end of our life the disjointed pieces will suddenly come together, and we shall see the symmetry and beauty of the Divine thought. Then we shall be satisfied.

In the meantime let us believe that God's love and wisdom are doing the very best for us.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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