

SIMPLE TALKS ON THE TABERNACLE

by

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE TABERNACLE OF FINE TWINED LINEN

“Thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them” (Exodus 26:1).

I HAD been spending some happy days in the home of a dear child of God. She had belonged to society and had been active in social work. Since she had found Christ her life had been completely changed. She had found other friends and other aims. Her daughter, a charming girl of eighteen, had not yet given her heart to the Saviour. This was hard for both. In life's most important questions they did not understand each other.

I had asked her to go with me for a walk. We chatted together for some time. I asked her if she would not like to be a Christian. She gave me a straightforward answer: “I should like to be like Mother, for she is certainly happy, but you see I am still so young and when I become religious I have to give up so many things!”

I could not blame the child; she saw only the badgers' skin covering; she had never seen the beautiful colored curtains. They can only be seen from the inside. Of course, I told her, it was not a question at all of giving up pleasant things, but of receiving. What a joy it was to me after a few months to receive a letter from her saying that Christ had found her and was her best friend, and that now she was the happiest girl in the world.

There are a great many people like my young friend. They only see the black roof of badgers' skins and believe that Christ's followers are all sad people. Why, Christianity was ushered into the world with a song and ends with the marriage of the Lamb. **“Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”**

I have had a long life and met a great many people on my travels. Many have opened their hearts to me. I may tell you, real Christians are the most joyful people I have met; they have a joy unspeakable, full of glory, a joy that is not depending on the state of the exchange or the weather, neither on good health, but finds its source in the Lord Jesus and He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

There are Christians, too, that have never advanced beyond the altar of burnt-offering and an occasional visit to the laver.

They have taken from Christ forgiveness of their sins, but they have never fully yielded their lives to Christ. They have not gone on to know the Lord. They remained in the court and have never seen the beautiful curtains. The more we get to know the Lord, the more we shall grow in our inner life. **“Grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ”** (II Peter 3:18). Many Christians remain babies all their lives. When we do not go forward, we go back. Many Christians do not grow because they know the Lord so little.

What a wonderful sight for the priest who entered the sanctuary! Outside, the dark blue badgers' skins; inside, the golden walls, the ceiling of white twined linen woven with blue, purple and scarlet, figures of cherubim interwoven by skilful weavers, shining and reflecting in the light of the seven-armed candlestick; and this all is only a reflection of the beauty and majesty of our Saviour. Do we wonder that David says:

“Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee forever” (Psalm. 45:2).

The ceiling as well as the vail and the gate to the court were made of the same material, the warp being of the very finest pure white yarn and the weft dyed blue, purple and scarlet, Wise women were the spinners (Exodus 35:25), and wise men the weavers (Exodus 38:8). The skins and curtains as a whole are called the tabernacle in Hebrew, the dwelling-place; the coverings of rams' skins dyed red and the badgers' skins were called the tent; but when regarded separately, the ceiling with the colored curtains interwoven with cherubim was specially named the Tabernacle.

In studying the explanation of the interior of the tabernacle as the Holy Spirit gives us in Hebrews 10, we see that the inner vail of the tabernacle separating the Holy of holies from the sanctuary is a type of our Saviour as He lived in this world, the incarnate Son of God (Hebrews 10:20).

That vail was rent in twain when our Lord gave up the ghost. No human hand could have done this for it was rent in twain from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51).

Christ has rent the vail. He has opened the way into the Holiest. We need not wait till we depart to be where Christ is; we may have that life in heaven even when we are still pilgrims on earth. Heaven is where God is, and God is omnipresent. God is where His children are.

Brother Lawrence had this practice of the presence of God. He believed God was with him when he was washing dishes as well as when he was tending the sick. Oh, the blessedness of such a life in the holiest! May the Holy Spirit make it the habit of our soul to live in God's presence. Let us have boldness to go through the rent vail. I cannot but think it was Father that caused the vail to be rent. He longs for His children. He wants them always to abide with Him.

We have been standing looking at the vail as the light of the candlestick was shining upon it: Christ living, suffering and dying for us. Now let us lift up our eyes and look at the ceiling of white linen resplendent in its colors of blue, purple and scarlet.

We see in it a type of the risen Christ ascended into heaven, the glorified Christ sitting on the right hand of the Father. When we read Exodus 26:1, 31 carefully and compare them we notice that in the ceiling the order is fine linen, blue, purple and scarlet; in the gate of the court and the inner vail: blue, purple, scarlet, and fine linen last.

The Holy Spirit has been pleased, in describing the ceiling, to draw our attention first to the white twined linen: the sinlessness, the spotlessness and holiness of Him that sat on the right hand of God in glory. When we enter the court, the Holy Spirit in teaching us to know Christ directs faith to look at the blue color first. **“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.”** He came from heaven, He lived heaven on earth, and He went up to heaven. This is what the heavenly blue on the ceiling teaches. There is more.

“He was justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (I Timothy 3:16).

Surely great is the mystery of godliness. He is received into glory. The risen Christ, sitting at the right hand of the Father, is the same Saviour who lived, suffered, and died on earth. **“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today and forever”** (Hebrews 13:8). It is the same Jesus who died on the cross, who rose the third day and whom the disciples saw going up into heaven. He still wears the scars on hands and feet.

In meditating on the different coverings: the badgers' skins, the rams' skins dyed red, the goats' skins, we have seen what Christ has done for us, how He has suffered for us, and how through Him we have remission of sins and all benefits of His passion.

On the ceiling we see first the white linen, the Son of God, the Lamb of God without spot. Our faith learns to look away from the gifts to the Giver.

Although it is now many years ago, I still remember how my heart was once thrilled with joy. I often had to speak at conferences in different parts of Europe, and I always tried to bring some small present to the children on coming back. If I came back late at night, they were sure to get up early to welcome me and my suitcase. I never liked to come empty-handed. But then, somehow, a painful thought came into my heart. I felt there was a danger of the boys looking for the present rather than for me. I told them the next time I had to leave them that this time I should not bring them anything.

I was away for a fortnight and longed to be home, and I felt sorry that I had told the children that this time I should not bring back anything. When I got near to home, I wondered whether the children would be waiting for me. I had nothing for them. I nearly felt tempted to go back to town and buy something for them. The nearer to home, the heavier my heart. Would they be glad that Father is back even when he has nothing to give them?

I was wrong. They ran to meet me, and when I told them I had nothing for them this time, my little laddie jumped in my arms and said, “Dad, I love you all the same even when you do not bring us anything.” How my heart rejoiced. The many-colored ceiling teaches us that Christ is worthwhile to be loved by us apart from what He gives us.

He is the altogether lovely one. A. B. Simpson experienced this when he wrote:

Once it was the blessing,
Now it is the Lord.
Once it was the feeling,
Now it is the Word.
Once His gifts I wanted,
Now Himself alone.
Once it was power I yearned for,
Now the Mighty One.

The four different colors show us four glorious traits in our Lord.

The white linen speaks of the stainless purity of our mediator.

Peter, who lived three years in close association with the Master, testified: “**He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.**” And he was willing for his beloved Master not only to suffer hardship, but to be crucified.

The blue is the color of heaven. “**No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven**” (John 3:13).

Have you ever noticed in reading the Gospels how often Christ's thoughts dwelt in His Father's home and with His Father? Blue reminds us also of His heavenly character. His meet was to do the will of His Father and to seek His glory.

Purple is the color for His royal character.

He is the King's Son, before Him all kings shall fall down; all nations shall serve Him. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth (Psalm. 72).

In the annunciation the angel said to the virgin:

“**He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end**” (Luke 1:32, 33).

Has not the word of the angel been fulfilled? “**He shall save his people from their sins.**” Dare we doubt that these latter promises shall also have their literal fulfillment? The purple shall be on His shoulder. And the beautiful hymn, shall it not soon find its fulfillment?

Jesus Christ shall reign victorious,
All the earth shall own His sway.

Scarlet reminds us of our Lord's passion.

In some passages the Hebrew word for scarlet is translated by “**worm.**” “**I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people**” (Psalm. 22:6).

To understand the meaning of the word “**scarlet**” read Psalm 22 on your knees, and let the Holy Spirit speak to you through it. It is the most graphic description of the crucifixion: the bones out of joint, the intense suffering, the action on the heart (verse 14); the extreme thirst (verse 15); the hands and feet pierced; the parting of the garments. And all this for you and for me.

The desolate cry in the verse, “**My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**”; the exultant, “**He hath done this,**” the Hebrew equivalent for the words, “**It is finished.**”

At the close, during those hours of agony and anguish, the meditation of our dying Saviour finished the ceremonial law, the veil rent in twain finished the fulfillment of prophecy; He finished the work which was given Him to do. He finished the work of atonement. As the Substitute and sin-bearer, the second Adam, sins of the race met on Him, but when He died, He put them away by the sacrifice of Himself.

- The scapegoat bore them into the land of forgetfulness from which they can never be recovered.
- The demand of divine justice was satisfied.
- Mercy and truth had met.
- Righteousness and peace embraced.

And the cry of a finished redemption shall be finally crowned by a cry of complete restitution. “**It is done**” (Revelation 21:6).

In the four Gospels, which also give us four different aspects of our Lord, we find again these four colors: white linen, blue, scarlet and purple.

Matthew shows us the purple, the promised Messiah, the Son of David, the King of the Jews, the fulfillment of prophecy.

Mark shows us the scarlet, the Servant of the Lord who went about doing good, who had come not to be ministered unto but to minister and give His life a ransom for many.

Luke shows us the white twined linen, the perfect Son of man, belonging to the whole human race, who had come to seek and find that which was lost.

John on eagle's wings lifts our soul on high and shows us the heavenly blue, the Son of God. He wanted to show us not chiefly what our Lord had done, but what He was in Himself.

He gives us a deep insight into the inner life of our Lord. In the heavenly blue he shows us how the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us “**and we beheld His glory (the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth**” (John 1:14).

White, blue, purple and scarlet, but all four blended together. There was a balance, a consistency in our Lord's character which made Him unique.

Some time ago a sentence struck me in a book I was reading: “Our Lord was musical.”

Surely the gracious words which fell from His lips had a sweetness of tone all of its own, and when the disciples sang the “Hallelujah” at the close of the Passover to the honor of God the Father, I am sure He did not keep silent, but joined them in the hymn of praise. Singing, He went to Gethsemane.

In another aspect we might say our Lord was musical. In Him all was harmony. His whole life was harmony, a symphony to the glory of His Father. When we study our Lord's life, no trait of character pushed the others in the background. When I study Peter's character there are traits in it I like; he was so human. If I study John's character there is much that attracts me. In our Lord all was consistent, all attractive, all lovely, all harmony.

Figures of cherubim were interwoven by skilful workmen; it may be by Bezaleel and Aholiab, who had been filled with the Spirit of God in all manner of workmanship. They are God's ministering servants, sent out to do His pleasure. Cherubim, no longer with a flaming sword as at the gates of Eden, but with outspread wings, greeted the worshipper as he entered the holy place.

They speak to us of the mighty power of Him who has said: “**All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth**” (Matthew 28:18).

In whatever direction the priest looked, everywhere he saw the wings of the cherubim. Under the shadow of those wings he felt perfectly safe. I too, as a member of His body, king and priest, may make my refuge in the shadow of God's wings “**until these calamities be overpast**” (Psalm. 57:1), and praise Him: “**Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice**” (Psalm. 63:7).

“**He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High, shall abide under the shadow of *El-shaddai*, the all-sufficient one.**”

The terror by night, the pestilence that walketh in darkness will have no terror for you. Reader, do you abide in the secret place of the most High? We are living in ominous times. Many hearts tremble with fear, but your heart is fixed. You know that adversities are the shadows of the wings of the all-sufficient One. He is never nearer to His children than when they need Him most.

A little boy with large, dark eyes, a pallid face, was lying on the operating table.

The old doctor put his hand on the heart as the nurse was administering the chloroform. He was pausing a moment; his eyes lifted upwards before he took the knife. How he longed with God's help to save the little life. "Is he under the chloroform?" As he took the knife, the boy was singing softly:

Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast,
There by His love o'ershadowed,
Sweetly my soul shall rest.

That little laddie was in the sanctuary under the protection of the wings of the Almighty.

White twined linen curtain! you speak to me of Him whose name is the Lord, our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6).

Do you know, reader, that the name of your King will be yours also? "**They shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord**" (Isaiah 62:12).

"He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness."

This is our present privilege. Here on earth already we are accepted in the Beloved, having on the breast-plate of righteousness (Ephesians 6:14), and when you love His appearing, the Lord will give you a crown of righteousness (II Timothy 4:8). Then no spot will be found any more on your garment. "***Your garments will always be white, and your head will not lack in oil***" (Ecclesiastes 9:8).

"Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Corinthians 13:12).

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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