

[STEM Publishing: The writings of C. H. Mackintosh](#): The Ministry of Christ Past, Present, and Future.

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Exodus 21: 1-6; John 13: 1-10; Luke 12: 37.

C. H. Mackintosh.

"For even the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

It is very necessary to retire from all thoughts about our service to the Lord, and our work for Him, and to have our hearts occupied with His service toward us. And when I say this, you will not suppose for a moment that it is my desire or thought to weaken in any heart in this assembly, in the smallest degree, the desire to work for Christ, whatever sphere He may open for you, or according to whatever gift He may have bestowed upon you. Quite the reverse; indeed, I would seek in every way to strengthen and intensify that desire. But then one knows, both from experience and observation, that we may be so occupied with our work and our services that our hearts may lose the sense of what Christ is toward us in His marvellous character as a servant.

Here let me say that my immediate thesis is the Lord Jesus as the servant of His people's necessities. That is the field into which we are introduced by these Scriptures. The Lord Jesus is the servant of the soul's necessities in every stage of its history, from first to last — from the depths of your ruin and degradation as sinners, in all your weakness and failure as saints from day to day, until He plants you in the joys of His own kingdom. And His services will not end there; for, as we read in Luke 12: 37, He will gird Himself, and serve us in the glory. Thus His work as a servant overlaps the whole of the soul's history, past, present, and future. He has served us in the past, He is serving us now, and He will serve us forever. And here allow me to say that the line of truth which I have to bring before you is of a directly individual character. We were speaking, previously, of the truth with respect to our corporate condition and character, and therefore I feel all the more free on this occasion to enter upon what is more directly personal — to speak of truth which bears directly on the soul's individual condition and wants. And I would ask you to place yourselves, so far as through grace you can, in all simplicity and reality, straight in view of this theme — Christ the servant of our necessities. It is possible there may be souls who want to begin at the very beginning with this most precious theme. They want to know Christ as the One who came into this world to serve them in all their deep and varied need as lost, self-destroyed, guilty, hell-deserving sinners. If there be any such, I would ask them to ponder deeply that verse which I have read, "The Son of Man is come to serve and to give." This is a divine reality. Jesus came into this world to meet our need, to serve us in all that in which we need His precious service, and to give His life a ransom for many; to serve us by bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, and working out a full and an eternal salvation. He did not come to get did not come to take — He did not come to be ministered to did not come to be gazed at came to be used; and therefore, while the soul that is exercised may be raising this harassing question, "What can I do for the Lord?" the answer is, "You must pause and see and believe what the Lord has done for you. You must stand still and see the salvation of God." Remember those words of divine and evangelistic sweetness. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness (Rom. 4: 5). You can never intelligently or properly serve Christ until you know and believe how He has served you. You must cease your restless doings, and rest in a divinely accomplished work.

Then but not until then, will you be able to start on a career of Christian service. It is most

necessary for all anxious souls to understand that all true Christian service begins with the possession of eternal life, and is rendered in the power of the Holy Ghost, the indwelling Spirit, in the light and on the authority of holy Scripture. This is the divine idea of Christian work and service.

Now, though the primary object is for those who are saints of God, who have set out on their course, still I do not think it would be according to the heart and sympathies of Christ to overlook the fact that there may be some soul that wants, as I said, just to begin at the very beginning with this precious mystery — Christ the servant; that have never taken the attitude of simple repose in Christ's finished work. They have, it may be, begun to think of their soul's salvation, to think about eternity; but they are occupied with the thought that the Lord is claiming something from them: "I must do this, I must do that, and I must do the other." Now, if such there be, I repeat, with deepest earnestness, you must cease altogether from your own doings, cease from your own reasonings, cease from your own feelings; because, be assured of it, it is neither feeling nor thinking nor reasoning nor doing at all, but it is pausing and gazing. It is hearing and believing. It is looking off from yourselves and your service to Christ and His service. It is ceasing from your restless and worthless doings, and reposing in full, unquestioning confidence in the one offering of Jesus Christ, which has perfectly satisfied and perfectly glorified God as to the great question of your sin and guilt. Here lies the divine secret of peace — peace in Jesus — peace with God — eternal peace. Nothing will ever be right till you get on this ground. If you are occupied with your doings for Christ, you will never get peace; but if you will only take God at His word, and rest in His Christ, you shall possess a peace which no power of earth or hell can ever disturb.

Now, I ask you, before I proceed, this question, Is there a heart that has not yet rested here? Is there a heart that will say, I am not satisfied with Christ's service; I cannot rest in His work? What! The Son of God has stooped to serve you. The One who made you, the One who gave you life and breath and all things, the One to whom all are responsible, He has stooped to become your servant. It is not a question of asking you to do any thing, or asking you to give any thing, because — mark those words — they are words which sweep all through the history of the Son of Man — they are words which, in all their length and breadth and fullness, you can take up and use as if you were the only object of this service in the world — "The Son of Man is come to serve and to give." He is not come to get; He is not come to ask.

The legal mind leads you to think that God is an exactor — that He is making demands upon you — that He wants your services in one way or another. But oh, remember, that your first great business, your primary and all-important work, is to believe in Jesus — to rest sweetly in Him, and in what He has done for you on the cross, and in what He is doing for you on the throne. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." You remember the interesting question of the Psalmist — a question asked when his eye rested on the magnitude and multitude of Jehovah's benefits — "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits?" What is the reply? "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord."

Is this the way to "render unto the Lord"? Yes, this is just the way that gratifies and glorifies Him. If you really want to render, you must take. Take what? "The cup of salvation" — a full and brimming cup, most surely; and as you drink of that cup, as the glories of God's salvation shine in the vision of your soul, then will streams of living praise flow from your grateful heart. And you know He says, "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth Me."

In a word, then, you must, first of all, allow your soul to dwell upon the marvellous mystery of Christ's service toward you in all the depth of your need; and the more you dwell upon that, the more

will you be in the true attitude to serve Him.

Take another striking illustration. When David, as you remember, in that remarkable passage in the second book of Samuel (chap. 7), sat in his house of cedar, and looked around at all that God had done for him, he said, "I must rise and build a house."

Immediately the prophet was dispatched to David to correct him on this point: "You shall not build Me a house, but I will build you a house." You must reverse the matter. God wants you to sit down and gaze yet more fully and intently upon His actings on your behalf. He wants you to look, not only at the past and the present, but to look on into the bright future; to see your entire history overlapped by His own magnificent grace.

And what was the effect of all this upon the heart of David? We have the answer in that one pithy statement: "Then went King David in, and sat before the Lord, and said, 'Who am I?' " Mark the attitude, and ponder the question. They are full of deep meaning. "He sat." This is rest and sweet repose. He wanted to go to work too soon. No, says God, you must sit down and look at My work, and trace My actings on your behalf in the past, the present, and the future.

And then the question, "Who am I?" In this we see the blessed fact that self was for the moment lost sight of. It was flung into the shade by the lustre of divine revelation. Self and its poor little actings were set aside by the glory of God and the rich magnificence of His actings on behalf of His servant.

Now, some might have thought that David was an active, useful man when he was rising to take the trowel to build the house; and they might have thought him a good-for-nothing man to be sitting still when there was work to be done. But, let us remember that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts. He prizes our worship much more highly than our work. Indeed, it is only the true and intelligent worshiper that can be a true and intelligent workman. No doubt God most graciously accepts our poor services, even stamped as they so often are with mistakes of all sorts. But when it becomes a question of the comparative value of service and worship, the former must give place to the latter; and we know that when our brief span of working time shall have expired, our eternity of worship shall begin. Sweet thought!

And let me further remark, ere leaving this part of our subject, that no one need fear in the least that the practical effect of what I have been saying will be to cripple your service, or lead you to fold your arms in culpable idleness or cold indifference. The very reverse is the case, as you may see in the history of David himself. Study at your leisure 1 Chronicles 28 - 29. There you have a splendid presentation of service — most triumphant answer to all who would place work before worship. There you see, as it were King David rising from the attitude of worshiper into that of a workman, and making ample provision for the building of that very house of which he was not allowed to set one stone upon another.

And not only does he make provision according to the claims of holiness, but, as he says "Because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, overlay the walls of the house." In other words, as we should express it, out of his own private purse, he gave the princely sum of over sixteen millions as a free gift toward the house which was to be reared by the hand of another. This, as he informs us, was "over and above what he had prepared for the holy house which latter greatly exceeded the amount of England's national debt. Thus we see that it is the true worshiper to that makes the effective servant. It is when we have sat and gazed on the actings of Christ for us that we are enabled in any small degree to act for Him. And then, too, we shall be able

to say with David, as he surveyed the untold wealth prepared for the house of God, "It is all Thine, and of Thine own have we given Thee."

But we must now turn for a few moments to the opening paragraph of Exodus 21 — "If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve; and in the seventh, he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have borne him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out say himself And If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door-post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him forever."

Here, then, we have one of the shadows of good things to come — a shadow or figure of the True Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, that blessed One who loved the Church and gave Himself for it. The Hebrew servant, having served the legal time, was perfectly free to go out; but he loved his wife and his children, and that, too, with such a love as led him to surrender his own personal liberty for their sakes. He proved his love for them by sacrificing himself. He might have gone forth and enjoyed his freedom, but what of them? How could he leave them behind? Impossible. He loved them too well for that; and hence he deliberately walked to the door-post, and there, in the presence of the judges, had his ear bored in token of perpetual service.

This was love indeed. There was no mistake about it. The wife and each child, as they gazed ever after on that bored ear, could read the touching and powerful proof of the love of that servant's heart.

Here is something for the heart to dwell upon — yea, something over which the heart may well break itself. We see in this Old Testament type the everlasting Lover of our souls — Jesus, the true servant. You remember that remarkable occasion in our Lord's life when He was setting before His disciples the solemn fact of His approaching cross and passion. You will find it in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Mark: "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He spake that saying openly. And Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him." Peter would fain, though he knew it not, have interrupted the True Servant in His movement to the door-post. He would have Him pity Himself, and maintain His own personal freedom. But oh, hearken to the withering rebuke administered to the very man who just before had made such a fine confession of Christ! "But when he had turned about and looked on His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, 'Get thee behind Me, Satan; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.' "

Mark the action. "He turned and looked on His disciples," as though He would say, If I harken to your counsel, Peter — if I pity Myself — if I retreat from that cross which lies before Me, then what is to become of these? It is the Hebrew servant saying, "I love my wife, I love my children, I will not go out free."

It is of the very last possible importance for us to see that there was no necessity whatever laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ to walk to the cross; there was no necessity whatever laid upon Him to leave the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity and come down here; and when He had come down into this world, and taken perfect humanity upon Him, there was no necessity laid upon Him that He should have gone to the cross; for at any moment during the whole of His blessed history, from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary, He might have gone back to where He came from. Death had no claim upon Him. The prince of this world came and had nothing in Him. He could say, speaking of His life, "No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" (John 10:18). And on

His way from the garden to the cross we hear Him saying, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" And may we not say there was much more truth than the utterers were aware of in these accents of mockery which fell on the blessed Saviour's ear as He hung on the cross — "He saved others; Himself He cannot save"? But they might have said, Himself He will not save.

Ah, no! blessed forever be His name! He did not pity or spare Himself, but He pitied us. He beheld us in our hopeless ruin, guilt, misery, and danger. He saw that there was no eye to pity, no arm to save; and — all praise to His matchless name! — He laid aside His glory, came down into this wretched world, became a man, that as a man He might, by the sacrifice of Himself, deliver us from the lake of fire, and associate us with Himself on the new and eternal ground of accomplished redemption, in the power of resurrection-life, according to the eternal counsels of God, and to the praise of His glory.

Now, we cannot possibly overestimate the importance of dwelling upon the fact that there was no necessity whatever laid upon our blessed Lord Jesus Christ to die on the cross, and to endure the wrath of God. Neither in His person, in His nature, nor in His relations was He obnoxious to death. He was God over all, blessed forever. He was the Eternal Son of God. And in His human nature He was pure, spotless, sinless, perfect. He knew no sin. He did always and only the things that please God. He glorified Him, and finished His work; and He has saved us in such a way as to glorify God in the most wonderful manner. He was, to use the language of our type, free to go out by Himself; but ah, had He done so, your place and mine must inevitably have been the lake of fire forever.

To all this the Holy Ghost delights to bear testimony, as one of our own poets has sweetly sung:
And, Lord, Thy perfect fitness
To do a Saviour's part,
The Holy Ghost doth witness
To each believer's heart.

Most true: and we might with equal truth say, "His fitness to do a servant's part," because it was the very height of His glory, the very dignity of His person; it was the glory whence He had descended, that enabled Him to stoop down to the very depths of their condition, that He has not a necessity — no, not one — in the deepest range of His people's history, or in the lowest depths of their condition, that He has not reached in His marvellous character and His divine ministry as the servant of His peoples necessities.

Brethren, let us never forget this. Nay, rather let us constantly cherish in our hearts the most grateful remembrance of it. The more we dwell upon the height of Christ's personal glory, the more fully we shall see the depths of His humiliation. The more profoundly we meditate upon the glory of what He was, the more we must be arrested by the grace of what He became. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich."

Who can measure the heights and the depths of those two words, "rich" and "poor," in their application to our adorable Lord and Saviour? No created intelligence can fathom them; but most assuredly we should cultivate the habit of dwelling upon the love that shines all along the pathway of the divine Servant as He walked to the cross for us. It is as we dwell upon His love to us that our hearts

shall be drawn out by the Holy Ghost in the power of responsive love to Him. "The love of Christ constraineth us because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should no henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (1 Cor. 5: 14-15).

II. Having thus glanced at our Lord's service toward us in the past, let us look for a few moments at His present service — at what He is now doing for us continually in the presence of God. This we have most blessedly presented to us in John 13. The same Precious grace shines in this as in all that on which we have been dwelling. If we look back The past, we behold the Perfect Servant nailed to the cross for us, if we look up to the throne now, we behold Him girded for us, no only according to our present need, but according to the perfect love of His love to the Father, His love to the Church His love to each individual believe from the beginning to the end of time.

"Now before the feast of the Passover den Jesus knew that His hour was come that that He should depart out of this world unto the Father having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end And during supper [see Greeks the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded." Here, then, we have a most marvellous presentation of Christ's present service toward "His OWN which are in the world." There is something peculiarly precious in the expression, His own." It brings us so very near to the heart of Christ. It is so sweet to think that He can look at such poor, feeble, failing creatures as we are, and say, They are Mine. It matters not what others may think about them; they belong to Me, and I must have them in a condition worthy of the place whence I came, and whither I am going. This is ineffably precious and edifying for our souls. It was in the sense of His personal glory, in the consciousness that He had come l from God and was going to God, that He could stoop down and wash His people's feet. There was nothing, could be nothing, higher than the place whence Jesus had come; there was nothing, could be nothing, lower than the defiled feet of His disciples: but, blessed and praised forever be His name! He fills up in His own divine person and marvellous service every point between those two extremes. He can lay one hand on the throne of God, and the other on our feet, and be Himself the divine and eternal link between.

Now, there are three things in this Scripture which I am anxious to put clearly before you. In the first place, we have the special action of our Lord toward His own in the world; secondly, the spring of that action; and thirdly, the measure of the action: the action, its spring, and its measure. 1. And first, the action itself. You will bear in mind that what we have presented here is not "the washing of regeneration." That pertains to the first stage of our Lord's service on our behalf. "His own which are in the world" — all who belong to that highly privileged class (and that is simply all who believe in His name) have passed through that great washing, in virtue of which Christ can pronounce them "clean every whit."

There is not a spot or a stain upon the very feeblest of that blessed number whom He calls "His own." "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all." If a single spot could be detected on one of Christ's own, it would be a dishonour cast upon Him, inasmuch as He has washed us from all our guilt according to the perfection of His work as the Servant of our need, and, far above all, the Servant of the eternal counsels, purposes, and glory of God. He found us clean never a whit, and He has made us "clean every whit."

This is the washing of regeneration, which is never repeated. We have a figure of this in the case of the priests of the Mosaic economy. On the great day of their inauguration they were washed in water. This action was never repeated. But after this, from day to day, in order to fit them for the daily discharge of their priestly functions, they had to wash their hands and their feet in the brazen laver in the tabernacle, or the brazen sea in the temple. This daily washing is the figure of the action in John 13. The two washings, being distinct, must never be confounded; and being intimately connected, must never be separated. The washing of regeneration is divinely and eternally complete: the washing of sanctification is being divinely and continually carried on. The former is never repeated; the latter is never interrupted. That gives us a part in Christ, of which nothing can rob us; and this gives us a part with Christ, of which any thing may deprive us. The one is the basis of our eternal life; the other is the ground of our daily communion.

See that you understand the meaning of having your feet washed, moment by moment, by the hands of that blessed One who is girded as the divine Servant of your present need. It is utterly impossible for any one to overestimate the importance of this work; but we may at least gather something of its value from our Lord's words to Peter; for Peter, like ourselves, alas! was very far from seizing the full significance of what his Lord was doing. "Then cometh He to Simon Peter; and Peter saith unto Him, 'Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?' Jesus answered and said unto him, 'What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.' Peter saith unto Him, 'Thou shalt never wash my feet.' Jesus answered him, 'If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me.'"

Here is the grand point — "part with Me." The washing of regeneration gives us a part in Christ: the daily washing of sanctification gives us a part with Christ. In order to full, intelligent, happy communion, we must have a clean conscience, and clean feet. The blood of atonement secures the former; the water of purification maintains the other. But both the blood and the water flowed from a crucified Christ. The death of Christ is the necessary basis of every thing. He died to make us clean; He lives to keep us clean. We are made as clean as His death can make us; we are kept as clean as His life can keep us.

And, be it remembered, this marvellous ministry of Christ on our behalf never ceases. He ever liveth to act for us on high, and to act on us and in us by His Word and Spirit. He speaks to God for us, and He speaks to us for God. He came from God, and travelled down to the profoundest depths of our need. He has gone back to God, to bear us ever on His heart, to meet our daily need, and to maintain us in the integrity of the position and relationship into which He has introduced us.

This is replete with solid comfort for the soul. We are passing through a defiling world, where we are constantly liable to contract evils of one kind or another which, though they cannot touch our eternal life, can very seriously affect our communion. It is impossible for us to tread the sanctuary of the divine presence with soiled feet; and hence the deep and unspeakable blessedness of having One ever in the presence of God for us — One who, having been in this scene knows its true character; and One who, having come from God, and gone back to Him, knows the full extent of His claims, and all that is needful to fit us for fellowship with Him. The provision is divinely perfect. Sin or uncleanness can never be found in the presence of God. If we can make light of either the one or the other, God cannot and will not. The holiness that shines in the demand for purity is as bright as the grace that provides it. Grace has made the provision but holiness demands the application thereof. The goodness of God provided a laver for the priests of old, but the holiness of God demanded that the priests should use that laver. The great washing of inauguration introduced them to the office of the priesthood; the washing in the laver fitted them for the duties of that office. How could acceptable priestly service be discharged with unclean hands? Impossible.

And we may say it is as impossible that we can walk in the pathway of holiness if our feet are not washed and wiped by that blessed One who has girded Himself to serve us in this matter perpetually.

All this is divinely simple. There are two links in Christianity; namely, the link of eternal life, which can never be snapped by any thing; and the link of personal communion which can be snapped in a moment by the weight of a feather. Now, it is as our ways are cleansed by the holy action of the Word, through the Holy Ghost, that our communion is maintained in its unbroken integrity. But if I am afraid to face the Word of God or if I am wilfully refusing its action, how can I enjoy communion with God?

I am not speaking now of ignorance of the Word of God. The Lord bears with a wonderful amount of ignorance in us — far more than we could bear with in one another. I do not now refer to the question of ignorance. But suppose a case. A young person entered these walls a few weeks ago, and took her seat on one of these benches. She was dressed out in all the fashion of this world — her head adorned with feathers and flowers, and her fingers with jewels. Her heart full of vanity and folly. Here the grace of met her in all its fullness and freeness. The arrow of divine conviction entered her soul. She was broken down under the mighty power of the Word, in the hands of the Holy Ghost. She was brought to repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. She was saved, there and then, and left the place rejoicing in a full salvation. This joy continued for many days. She was engrossed with her newly found treasure. She never thought about her feathers, her flowers, or her jewels. True, she continued to wear them, simply because she as yet saw nothing wrong in so doing. She knew not as yet that there was so much as a single sentence in the Word of God bearing upon such things.

Brethren, let me just remind you that we should be prepared for such a case as this, and be prepared to meet it. Some of us, I fear, have but little wisdom or patience to deal with cases of this type. We are in undue haste to enter upon what I may call the stripping process. This is a mistake. We must allow time for the hidden virtues of the kingdom of God to develop themselves. We must not attempt to reduce the Christian assembly into a place in which a certain livery is adopted. This will never do. We really cannot reduce all to a dead level. We must allow the Word of God to act on the life which the Spirit of God has implanted. I do nothing but mischief to people if I get them to adopt a certain style of dress merely at my suggestion. The grand thing is to allow the kingdom of God to assert its holy sway over the entire character. This is to His glory and reduce all to a dead level.

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Let us pursue our case. Our young friend, in the course of her reading, is arrested by the following pointed passage: "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Tim. 2: 9-10). And again, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3: 3-4).

Now, here, we have illustrated for us the present ministry of Christ—the action of the Word upon the soul—the application of the basin to the feet—the washing of water by the Word. It is Jesus stooping down to wash the feet of this young disciple. The question is, How will she receive the action? Will she resist it, or yield to it? Will she push away the basin? Will she refuse the gracious ministry? "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."

This is very solemn, and it demands our most serious attention. Next in moral importance to having the conscience purged by the blood of Christ stands this cleansing of our ways by the action of

the Word, through the power of the Holy Ghost. The former gives us a part in Christ; the latter, a part with Christ. That is never repeated; this must never be interrupted. If we really desire fellowship with Christ, we must allow Him to wash our feet moment by moment. We cannot tread the pure precincts of the sanctuary of God with defiled feet any more than we can enter them with a defiled conscience.

Hence, therefore, let us look well to it that we have our ways continually submitted to the purifying action of the precious Word of God. Let us put away every thing which that Word condemns; let us abandon every position and every association and every practice which that Word condemns, that so our holy fellowship with Christ may be maintained in its freshness and integrity. Nothing is more dangerous than to trifle with evil in any shape or form. Ignorance God can and does most graciously bear with, but the wilful resistance of His Word in any one point is sure to lead to disastrous results. The heart becomes hardened, the conscience seared, the moral sense blunted, and the whole moral being gets into a most deplorable condition. We get away from the Lord, and make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. May the Lord keep us near to Himself, walking with Him in tenderness of conscience and uprightness of heart. May His Word ever tell in living formative power upon our souls, that so our way be cleansed according to the claims of the sanctuary of God.

2 But let us now inquire for a moment into the spring of this action on which we have been dwelling. This is presented with touching sweetness and power in the first verse of John 13 — "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end."

Here, then, we have the mighty spring of Christ's present ministry. It is the changeless love of His heart — a love that was stronger than death, and which many waters could not quench. "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word" (Eph. 5: 25-26). This is the blessed basis and the motive — spring of that marvellous ministry which our Lord Jesus Christ is now carrying on for us and toward us. He knew what He was undertaking when He uttered those words in the fortieth Psalm, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." He knew what it would cost Him when He took up our case. But His love was and is divinely equal to all. We need not be afraid of exhausting that love which triumphed over all the unutterable horrors of Calvary, and went down under the deep and dark waters of death and judgement. We may at times feel ashamed to have so often to bring our defiled feet to that blessed One to cleanse them; but His love is equal to all, and that love is the spring of His precious and indispensable ministry.

It is a common saying that love is blind, but I look upon it as a libel upon love. Most certainly it does not and could not apply to the love of Christ. He knew all that was in us, and He knows now all our ways and all our weakness and all our follies; but He loves us notwithstanding all, and in the power of that love He acts toward us in order to deliver us from all that He sees in us and about us which would hinder our holy fellowship with the Father and with His Son.

Of what use would a blind love be to you or to me? Surely, none whatever. How could we ever repose in a love which only acted toward us in ignorance of our blots and blemishes! Impossible. What we want is a love superior to all our imperfections, and a love that can deliver us from them. This love we have in

Christ blessed be His name! It is a love that, however it may expose us to ourselves, will never expose us to another. It is a love that comes to us with the basin and towel, and stoops down in infinite tenderness and lowly, matchless grace to wash away every soil, and give us the comfortable sense of being "clean every whit." This is the love which you and I bed, and this is the love which we have found in divine fullness and power in the heart of that perfect Servant who is girded for us ever before the throne.

"Having loved His own which were in the world He loved them" — how long? As long as they behaved themselves, and walked with soiled feet? Ah, no! this would never do for such as we. "He loved them unto the end." Precious perfect, divine, everlasting love! a love that overlaps and underlies and outlives our blots and blemishes, our failings and falterings, our wants and weaknesses, our wanderings and waywardness; a love that is come to us armed with all that our condition could possibly demand; a love that will never cease to act for us and toward us and in us, until it presents us in unblemished perfectness before the throne of God. And now one word as to the measure of Christ's present action for us and toward us. This is a point of unspeakable value and importance. It is essential for us to know that whether it be a question of Christ's service for us in the past or His present service the measure of both the one and the other is and can be nothing less than the claims of the sanctuary, the throne, and the nature of God. We might suppose that the measure would be our necessities, but this could never do. If we think of Christ's atoning work, we know, and rejoice to know, His precious work has done very much more than meet the deepest measure of our necessities as sinners. Blessed be God! the work of the cross has divinely met all the claims of God. It could never give solid peace our souls merely to know that the very highest claims of human conscience had been met by the atoning death of Christ. We must be assured on divine authority that the highest claims of the government, the character the nature, and the glory of God have all been perfectly met by the precious work of Christ.

Thus it is through infinite grace, and here every divinely exercised soul can find settled and eternal peace. Nor is it otherwise in respect to Christ's present work for us. It could never satisfy our souls to be told that that work is measured by our very deepest need. That need is met, no doubt; but it is because Christ's present ministry goes far beyond that need, and reaches to, and satisfies the claims of, the sanctuary of God.

Unspeakable mercy! Here we may rest in perfect tranquillity. We have One on high undertaking for us, ever living in the presence of God for us; One who not only knows our necessities, but knows also the claims of God. He knows what this scene is through which we are passing, and He knows what that scene is into which He has entered; and, all praise to His name! He meets in His own perfect ministry both the one and the other. He must needs meet all our claims since He meets all God's claims, for the less must ever be included in the greater.

What solid comfort is here! What unruffled repose! We have One in the presence of God for us, in whose hands all our affairs are perfectly, because divinely, safe. They can never fall through, never go wrong. We may say that ere ever the very weakest of those whom Christ calls "His own in the world" can fail, Christ Himself must fail, and that can be never. His own are as safe as Himself.

What a grand reality! With what perfect confidence may we refer every objector, every accuser, every opposer, to this blessed manager! And what folly, on our part, to attempt to answer such ourselves! Oh, may we learn to lean more confidently on that blessed One who thus presents Himself before our souls as the girded servant of our deep and manifold necessities. May we prize His precious ministry more and more — His ministry for us, His ministry to us. May we repose more sweetly in the assurance that He is speaking to the Father for us, in all our failures, in all our shortcomings, in all our sins.

May we remember, for our exceeding comfort, that even before we slip, He has been pleading for us, as He pleaded for Peter. "I have prayed for thee," said the loving One, "that thy faith fail not." Oh, the matchless grace of these words! He did not pray that Peter might not fall, but that, having fallen, his confidence might not give way, his faith might not fail. Thus, too, He pleads for us, and thus we are sustained, and thus we are restored when we fall, else we should very speedily go from bad to worse,

and make shipwreck altogether. "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." We are sustained by His precious and powerful ministry every moment. We could not stand for a single hour without Him.

Things are continually turning up which would prove destructive of our fellowship, if we had not that blessed One acting for us, whose intervention on our behalf never ceases. He knows not only our need, but He knows what the sanctuary demands; and not only does He know it, but He provides for it, according to His own infinite perfectness and acceptance before God, meeting His people's necessities.

Now, there are some people who have got such a one-sided notion of the standing of the believer, that they throw the Lord's priestly ministry overboard altogether. I say it is one-sided, and there is nothing more dangerous than one-sided truth — nothing. I would far rather see a man going through the length and breadth of London publishing palpable error, such as the simplest mind could detect. I would have far less apprehension of the mischievous result of his ministry than of the teaching of a man who takes up one side of a truth, and presses it in such a way as to interfere with some other truth.

Now, there is an adjusting power in the truth of God — an adjusting power in Scripture that constitutes one of its brightest moral glories; and hence we find that while the Word of God most fully and blessedly establishes the truth that the believer stands complete in Christ, justified from all things, accepted in the Beloved, "clean every whit," it, at the same time with equal clearness and fullness, sets forth the fact that the believer is, in himself, a poor feeble creature, exposed to manifold snares, temptations, and hostile influences; liable at any moment to fall into error and evil; utterly unable to keep himself, or to grapple with the difficulties and dangers which surround him; liable at any moment to contract defilement, which would unfit him for the holy fellowship and worship of the sanctuary.

How, then, are all those things to be met? How is the Christian to be kept in the face of such things? Having an evil nature, a crafty foe, and a hostile world to cope with, how is he to get on? How is he to be kept? How is he to be restored if he wanders? How is he to be lifted up if he falls? The answer to all these questions is found in that ever-precious sentence of inspiration, "He ever liveth to make intercession for us"; and again, "He is able to save to the uttermost"; and again, "We shall be saved by His life"; and again, "Because I live, ye shall live also"; and again, "We have an advocate with the Father."

How the heart delights to give forth and to ponder over such utterances as these! They are marrow and fatness to the soul. How can any one, in the face of such passages — to say nothing of his own necessary experiences as to himself and his surroundings — think of calling in question the grand foundation-truth of the priesthood of Christ, in its application to believers now? I can only say, I know not. But alas! there is no accounting for the depths of error into which we may fall, if we allow our minds to work, and get away from the direct authority of holy Scripture. And we may truly say that a most palpable proof of our need of the intercession of Christ is to be found in the sad fact that any of His servants should be found to deny it.

I shall add no more on this point, save to warn all the Lord's dear people against the terrible error of denying our continual need of the priestly ministry, the precious intercession and all-prevailing advocacy of our Lord Jesus Christ — an error second only to the denial of His atoning work. For most surely our need of His priesthood is second only to our need of His atoning blood.

III. Having then briefly, and, alas! imperfectly, glanced at our Lord's ministry in the past and in the present, we cannot close without a reference to His ministry in the future. Some may feel disposed to say, I do not understand how our Lord can ever be found serving us in the future. I can understand His serving us now on the throne, but how He is to serve us in the kingdom is, I confess, beyond me.

No doubt it is most marvellous, and had we not His own veritable words for it, we might well hesitate in our statement of the fact that our Lord Christ shall serve His people in the brightness of the glory. But let us hear what He Himself saith to us. Turn for a moment to Luke 12: 35: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. "

This is distinct and unmistakable. Most marvellous, no doubt, but as plain as it is marvellous. Christ will serve us in the kingdom. He will serve us forever. His ministry overlaps our entire history. It reaches down to the very deepest depths of our need as sinners, and up to the very loftiest heights of the glory. It goes back to the past, it covers the present, and it stretches away into the boundless future. Blessed be His name! He loves to serve us, and He gives us the assurance that the very moment, as it were, that He enters upon the glory of His own kingdom, He will gratify His loving heart by making us sit down amid the very brightness of that glory, and there serving us in the same love that has characterised His service from the very first. All praise and eternal homage to His peerless name!

But mark another thing in this twelfth chapter of Luke. At the forty-first verse Peter puts the question, "Lord, speakest Thou this parable unto us, or even to all?" And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season. Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath."

Thus we have two things, namely, "watching" and "doing." Which does Christ value most? The former, unquestionably, as is proved by the higher reward attached to it. To have Christ serving us in the glory is something far beyond any position which He may in His goodness assign to us.

Let us, then, ever bear in mind, brethren, that our blessed Lord values, above all things, that loving attitude of the heart which expresses itself by watching for His return. No doubt it is blessed and important to be found "doing" also, whatever He gives us to do, whether it be sweeping a crossing or evangelising a nation; He will not allow the very smallest act of service to go unrequited. It is not that He values service less, but He values watching more, and we can understand this; even nature itself will teach it to us. Suppose the head of a family is absent from home; the servants are told to have things in readiness for his return, and each will be found doing his or her appointed work. They will say, Master is coming home; we must see and have all square and right for him. This is as it should be; but is there not something far deeper and higher than this? Is there not something that answers to the heart of that absent one? Surely there is; there is the earnest longing of an affectionate wife, without which the best ordered house would be but a poor, cold, cheerless thing to come back to.

Thus it is, be assured of it, with our beloved absent Lord. He prizes, above all things, the affectionate, earnest longings of our hearts to see His face. Something of what shone in Mephibosheth, when he said to David, "Let him take all, seeing my lord the king is come in peace." Oh, let us cultivate more of this, dearly beloved in the Lord; let us see to it that we are of those who love the appearing of our adorable Lord and Saviour! May the cry of our hearts be continually, "Why tarry the wheels of His chariot?"

Will this make us deficient in service? The very reverse. Nay it is this which will give the true spring to all service, and impart a holy fragrance to the very smallest act which may be done. Whereas, if this deep personal affection be lacking, the most splendid and showy acts of service are as nothing to

the heart of Jesus. The two mites of the widow were more precious to Christ than the most princely gifts of heartless offerers. Show me a heart that is watching for Christ, and I will show you a pair of hands occupied for Him in some way or another. It does not matter in the least what we are doing, provided it be the very thing which our Lord has given us to do, and there is nothing that will so quickly enable us to know what service to do as a loving heart. There is an instinct, a tact about true love, that leads it to find out at once what is grateful to its object.

This is what is wanting, brethren. There may be a vast amount of busy activity — of running hither and thither — of coming and going but if the heart be not occupied with Christ, the hands and feet and head are little worth. He, blessed forever be His name! has given us a whole heart, and nothing can satisfy Him in return but a whole heart from us. His entire service — past, present, and future — is the fruit of His perfect love; and nothing can meet His desire, with respect to us, save a heart responsive in its affections to Him. And where there is this, it will express itself in an anxious, earnest longing for His coming. "Blessed are those servants, whom their lord when he cometh shall find watching."

May the eternal Spirit fill our hearts with genuine love to the Person of our own adorable Lord and Saviour; that so our one grand and undivided purpose may be to live for Him in this scene from which He has been cast out, and to wait for that moment when we shall see Him as He is, and be like Him and with Him forever.