

"THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM."

"As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. II Cor. 6:9-10.

Against misrepresentations and slanders, Paul, in the context, vindicates his apostolic authority, and proclaims at the same time the unworldly policy or principle which animated both him and his fellow-workers. In doing this, he exhibits a map of his apostolic work, in a series of graphic sketches, -- sketches over which there are dark shadows as well as celestial beams. These words present to us the two opposite sides of a good man's life, the secular and the spiritual; the side as seen by man, and the side as seen by Almighty God. We have here the grand characteristics of apostolic life. Examining these in order, we notice: --

I. Conspicuousness in Obscurity.

"As unknown, and yet well known."

1. God's people are "hidden ones."

"The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." What comes within the range of the senses the world can understand; but what is only spiritually discerned the world cannot know. The world has never yet rightly interpreted and understood the real life of a genuine disciple of Christ. To the world, Paul appeared an ignominious fanatic. The world does not understand self-sacrificing love, the animating, shaping, directing principle of a godly man's life. It understands ambition, greed, revenge, but not this.

2. These hidden ones occupy a most prominent position before God. Though thus unknown to men, they are well known to others.

(1) Well known to Christ.

"The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous." "I know My sheep." Christ knows all about His disciples -- everything connected with their inner lives and outward circumstances. What a blessed thought!

(2) Well known to heavenly spirits.

They are famous in heaven. At their conversion heaven rejoiced, and over every step of their subsequent history heaven watches with a loving care. "Encompassed about with a cloud of witnesses." "He giveth His angels charge over thee."

II. Life in Death.

"As dying, and behold we live."

1. The life of the old man dies by the painful, lingering process of crucifixion.

2. A new Divine life is planted in the soul which develops in proportion as the old man is crucified.

To worldly men Paul appeared as mortal as other men; with a frame scourged by persecution,

shattered by perils, wasted by labor and want, he was nothing but a dying man. His contemporaries knew that he would soon run himself out and mingle with the dust of all departed men. He was nothing more to them than a dying man.

But spiritually he was living. "Behold we live." The soul within that dying body of his was living a wonderful life -- a life of Christly inspirations and aims, a life of communion with heaven; a life destined to become more sunny, vigorous, and beautiful with every aspiration and act. Living is not body breathing, but spirit acting -- acting according to the Divine will.

III. Safety in Afflictive Providence.

"As chastened, and not killed."

The word "chastened" here refers to his various scourgings suffered in the synagogues and elsewhere. For a catalogue of his sufferings read II Cor. 11:23-27. To worldly spectators, he, with all his wounds, would appear a dead man; but spiritually he was alive. The stripes and the hardships did not touch his soul. His spiritual purposes, enjoyments, and hopes were not killed. Spiritual life is unkillable. Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live." It is only a true Christian who can say, "I live."

IV. Joy in Sorrow.

"As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

1. The sources of a believer's sorrows.

- (1) In his heart and life there are many things to cause it.
- (2) In his circumstances.

2. He can look beyond all these to the counterbalancing joy.

"The joy of the Lord is his strength." As if Paul had said, Under our sufferings we seem to be very cast down and sad; we are counted as the offscouring of all things; dreary, degraded, and wretched does our life seem to the worldly men around us. So it often is with the life of a Christian man; often his afflictions are so great, his poverty so crushing, his home so wretched, that the worldly man looks at him and says, "Poor wretch!" But on the spiritual side of a truly godly man is "always rejoicing" -- rejoicing in a good conscience, rejoicing in a stream of pure and noble thoughts, rejoicing in a consciousness of Divine favour, rejoicing in the love of God -- "always rejoicing."

V. Munificence in Poverty.

"As poor, yet making many rich."

God's people are often poor as to this world. Christ Himself was poor. But apart altogether from external circumstances, God's people feel themselves to be spiritually poor. In the fall man lost everything. But a rich connection has been formed on the part of God's chosen ones with the Lord of all, who has "unsearchable riches."

Paul and his colleagues were indeed poor; they had suffered the loss of all things. Often breadless, homeless and clad in rags, they were indeed poor. Yet spiritually they were not only rich but made others rich. They were not only rich with heavenly treasures, but they imparted riches to others. "Having nothing, yet possessing all things." This may be true of us.

1.. Knowledge is wealth.

A child well educated is better endowed, though his parents do not leave him a single penny, than the child who is uneducated, and who is heir to a large fortune.

2. Wisdom is wealth.

The prudence and sagacity which enable a man to see what is best is the most valuable capital with which a man can conduct business.

3. Contentment is wealth.

To make the best of things as things are.

4. Hope is wealth.

5. Cheerfulness is wealth.

6. Love is wealth.

Just think of the wealth of a true Christian. He possesses : --

1. The Spirit of God, and in Him life and light and love.
2. In the Son of God a Redeemer who is devoted to him, to save him from his sins.
3. In the God to whom he is reconciled, a Father.
4. In salvation the greatest good which God can bestow and a title to "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."
5. As a saved person -- knowledge, wisdom, contentment, cheerfulness, hope and love.
6. All the most useful things -- "living bread," "living water," raiment that waxeth not old -- "robes of righteousness and garments of salvation."
7. All the most enduring things -- "an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away."
8. All the most precious things. Phil. 4:19.

The highest work of man is to impart spiritual riches to his brother man. This work is most dignified and delectable. Worldly poverty does not disqualify a person for the discharge of this sublime mission.

VI. Boundless Possessions in Utter Destitution.

"Having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

Nothing of this world's goods, yet rich. Paul says, "All things are yours." Christliness gives us an interest in all things that are worth while. We can derive pleasure from the works of God -- the heavens, the earth, the hills, the streams, the cattle on

on the mountains or in the vales, as the works of God. We can enjoy them as His works and say, "Our Father made them all." They are given to man to enjoy; they are part of the inheritance of man; and though we cannot call them our own in the legal sense, yet we can call them ours in the sense that we can derive pleasure from their contemplation, and see in them the proofs of the wisdom and the goodness of God. The child of God who looks upon the hills and vales, upon an extensive, and beautiful farm or landscape, may derive more pleasure from the contemplation of them as the work of God and His gift to man, than the real owner does, if unsaved, from contemplating all this as his own.

Do not estimate life by appearances -- things are not what they seem. Christliness with poverty, persecution, and suffering is infinitely to be preferred to wickedness with the whole world at its command.