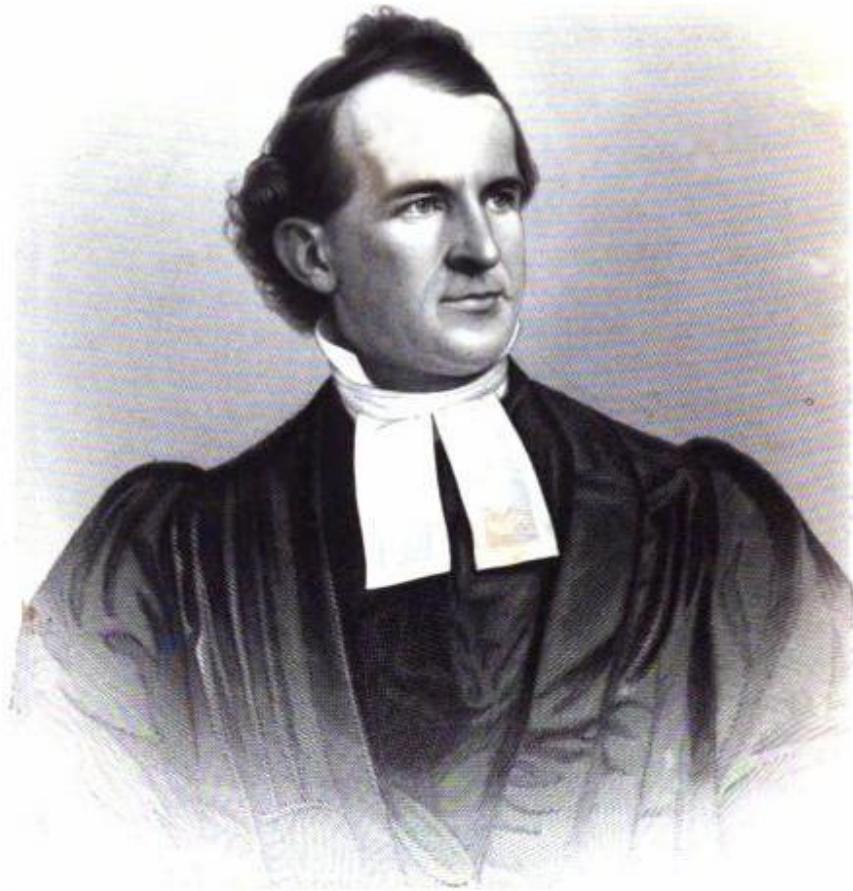


The Attractive Power of the Cross of Christ



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*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth,
will draw all men unto Me. — St. John, xii, 32*

When Jesus spake these words, *His gaze was fixed upon the Cross.* The “lifting up from the earth,” to which He referred, “was the hour, when, nailed to the accursed tree, He should be “lifted up” on Calvary, in the sight of a mocking and insulting crowd, to endure the bitter and ignominious death of the crucified. Such an interpretation of His words is not a suggestion of the fallible human mind; it is the explanation of the sacred writer himself. *This He said,*” adds St. John, “*signifying what death He should die.*” And yet, it was a joyful exclamation—a prediction uttered with a heart swelling with love, and full of anticipations of coming triumph. And so, we may believe that, throughout the whole life of Jesus, His eye was fixed upon the closing scene upon Calvary, longing for the great consummation of His redeeming work. Never, it may be, was that vision of suffering and shame hidden from His mind. Hence it was that so often He forewarned His disciples of those fast-approaching scenes. Hence His earnest expression, “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” Hence, even in the midst of the transcendent glory of the Transfiguration, and in communion with the glorified spirits of Moses and Elijah, His converse was only of “His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.” And now, as the hour draws nigh, and the shadow of the Cross falls darkly upon Him, it is almost with the language of exultation that He exclaims, “Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out; and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.”

What a testimony to the divine omniscience of Christ is to be gathered from such a prediction! What more unlikely than that the drawing of all hearts to the persecuted Nazarene should follow His being lifted up upon the Cross! What, to human judgment, seemed better fitted to secure the rejection of Christianity, than the death of its Founder by the Roman penalty of crucifixion—a death of ignominy, to which only the basest malefactors were consigned?

Yet, in the face of all this likelihood, Jesus predicts the very opposite results, and makes His Cross of agony and shame the mighty magnet which should attract the world to Him as its Redeemer— “the polar power of the spiritual world, to which every heart should tremble and turn.”

The attractive power of the Cross, and the powerlessness of all else, to draw the heart to God—this is now our theme.

Perhaps the most difficult problem which infinite wisdom had to solve in the redemption of our world was this: How can the love of a revolted and alienated race of beings be won back to God? It was a problem quite distinct from others, which must be solved ere man could be redeemed. It was one thing to reconcile God to man; it was another to reconcile man to God. It was one thing to remove the mighty barriers which stood in the way of guilty man's return to his offended and outraged Sovereign; it was quite another to move him to rush with outgushings of love back to the outstretched arms of his Creator. It was one thing that the face of the Infinite One should be turned with a smile of forgiving love upon His erring child; it was another to make that prodigal child look up, and, with a full and bursting heart, say, Abba! Father!

And so take the human heart now, dead and cold to God; without one throb of love to God—nay, with an aversion to Him, and no desire for His love or favor; and how shall that alienated heart be won to tenderness, to gratitude, to fervent love? There is but one way; there is but one power mighty enough to effect it. Infinite wisdom tried but one way; it was the way Jesus declared when He said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me! "One chord alone in man's cold heart could be touched with the hope of awakening a response, and that chord must be swept by the finger of love—love reaching its sublimest manifestation upon the Cross of Calvary.

Let us, however, not anticipate our subject, but first seek to elevate it, by testing the worth and power of other means to effect this great design.

I. And, first, see how powerless our highest natural conceptions of God are to awaken love to Him. The instinctive and universal feeling towards God, where he is unknown as "God in Christ," as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," is a feeling of *dread*. Where, in any heathen nation, is there to be found the conception of God as a being to be loved? Where does love mingle with their worship? Is it not all fear, dread, terror? What is the meaning of the almost-universal prevalence of human sacrifices? What mean the offerings to Moloch, the drownings in the sacred Ganges, the immolations under Juggernaut's car? What do all the cruel and bloody rites of heathenism mean but this—that the Deity is *to be feared*, to be *dreaded*, to be *propitiated*, and that there is nothing in His character to awaken love?

And this feeling has its basis in man's moral nature, in the sense of guilt and ill-desert, in the law written by the finger of the great Creator upon every human soul. Tell me alone of the omnipotence of God in its sublimest aspects, and the intelligence is only fitted to fill me with alarm, as the array of the forces of Him whose power I have cause to fear. Tell me of His unsullied justice alone, and I am prompted to flee from the face of Him whose laws I have broken, and whose just anger I have incurred. Tell me of the dazzling holiness of the Being "in whose sight the heavens are not clean," and rather than be drawn to His presence, would my strongest impulse be to call upon the rocks and mountains to hide me, the unholy and unclean, from His gaze.

II. Nor is *nature*, or *the visible universe*, better able to accomplish this great work of drawing the heart of man to God, where the universe is beheld without the light of Revelation.

Such an announcement may sound strange to many who all their lives have been accustomed to “look through nature up to nature’s God.” There are certain minds, gifted with a love of the beautiful, and elevated by a high degree of culture, who, as they behold the radiant glories of the morning, or the milder beauty of the setting sun, the splendor of night when the firmament is all glowing with living lights, the beauty of spring-time, the golden harvest-fields of summer and the gorgeous hues of autumn, the grandeur of mountain and cataract and ocean, can only see incentives to love towards Him who traces the lines on every leaf, and colors every flower with beauty. They forget how much of the beautiful light from the face of nature *is reflected light from the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*. How different its aspect to those who are without a knowledge of salvation through the Redeemer! Has nature ever taught the heathen world to love God? Nay, where the light of the Gospel has never penetrated, all the beauty and grandeur and sublimity of this goodly universe have been powerless to enkindle in the darkened and degraded soul one throb of genuine love to the Creator.

Men forget also that nature has two voices, and that her testimony is far from being harmonious and invariable. If tokens of goodness abound on every side, they are commingled with signs of severity. The surface of the earth, so fair and smiling with the fruits of plenty, might speak of the hand of a loving and bounteous Father; but within and beneath the soil are to be found traces of convulsion, disaster, and ruin, which might indicate the judgments of an angry Deity. The gentle refreshing rain of summer might bear one testimony to God, and the fearful tempest or desolating tornado another. The air of heaven, now bringing health to the invalid’s wasted frame, bears witness to the goodness of God; while the same element, laden with the deadly pestilence, would seem to testify of the harsh severity of a wrathful Deity. Cast the human soul out amidst these conflicting testimonies of nature, with no light from on high to reconcile them, and to blend all discordant voices into one harmonious utterance, and, so far from the heart being drawn to God, it might despair to find whether the God of nature were indeed a God of love.

III. *Is the providence of God, then, able to do what nature cannot?* Alas! we are met here by a like impotency. Conflicting testimonies abound here, also. Is there, on the one hand, much peace and comfort? There is, on the other, more strife and want. Here is a land over which peace smiles, there a country desolated by the ravages of war. Here are happy homes, with unbroken family circles; there are darkened apartments and silent halls and cheerless firesides. On the one side, I hear blithe voices, making music in their joy; but again. “the air is filled with sighings and wailings for the dead; the heart of Rachel, for her children mourning, will not be comforted.” Thousands bask in wealth; tens of thousands struggle from the cradle to the grave with stern, relentless poverty. The best of men are often the most severely afflicted and sorely persecuted—the basest, oftentimes, most highly exalted. Amidst scenes like these, what is there, apart from this lamp of God, to assure the human mind that the God of providence is a God of love—what to win the love of the heart already dead to Him?

IV. Now, then, the great question returns to us, yet unsolved, how can the heart of man be won to God? For love must be *won*, alone. No other influence can for a moment be allowed to have sway here. “Authority cannot command love. Force cannot implant it. Terror cannot

charm it into existence. The threatenings of vengeance may stifle or may repel, but never can call forth love into being.”

Love must be won, but *how won?* There was but one power mighty enough to do it, and that power was *love* itself. All the hoarded love of the heart of God towards His erring child must be manifested, to enkindle a return of love. Oh! it seemed as though God, who knew what was in man, knew that in his dark and guilty bosom there was but one solitary hold that he had over him, and that, to reach this, He must put forth all the might of the Godhead in His display of love, and show to man all the yearnings of a Father’s heart over a wayward and yet beloved child. And this was done. It was by a love which left nothing more that God could do—a love in which He gave His highest, richest gift. It was a love in which Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, embarked all their infinite treasures. It was a love at which angels wondered, in silent adoration and awe. It was a love that could go no higher, for it came from the bosom of the Infinite—God spared not His Son; it was a love that could reach no lower, for it reached to the Cross of ignominy and shame.

This was God’s expedient to draw to Him the love of a disaffected and alienated world. This is the meaning of the Cross—love stooping to win the human heart—love triumphing over all difficulties—love making its last and most powerful appeal. And this was the meaning of Jesus when He uttered the wondrous prediction, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me!” He looked beyond “the offence of the Cross,” beyond the “stumbling-block” which His death of ignominy might prove to the benighted Jew or contemptuous Greek, and beheld it, “the power of God and the wisdom of God.” He knew that even as the hope of the world’s redemption hung upon that last crowning act upon the Cross, His own willing sacrifice as the Lamb of God, “bearing our sins in His own body on the tree,” “wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities;” so that lowest depth of humiliation, that most terrible endurance of suffering, that mightiest evidence of the love of God, *must* forever draw the hearts of men to Him. He saw streaming from that Cross mighty and irresistible influences, reaching into far-distant ages, unchanging and unwasting, ever, while time lasted, melting human enmity and obduracy into tenderness and love. He saw unborn generations looking to the spectacle on that Cross, even as the dying Israelites looked to the serpent of brass, and in that look of faith finding life unto their souls. He saw men out of every kindred and people and tribe and tongue “looking upon Him whom they had pierced, and mourning for Him as one mourning for a first-born son.” All this, and more than this, passed before the vision of the blessed Saviour, as He uttered these prophetic words. And the vision of this made Him long for the hour of His “*uplifting*.” Even then, “for the joy set before Him”—the joy of drawing all hearts to Him—He longed to “endure the Cross, despising the shame.” Already He saw of “the travail of his soul, and was *satisfied*.” Already, it may be, “His ear caught the far-distant shout of His redeemed and glorified church, singing, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!”

V. Now, let us pass to mark *the fulfilment* of the Redeemer’s prediction. How has that strange prophetic utterance been verified? Has the blessed Saviour’s vision been realized? Has the Cross, with its scenes of agony and shame, proved a mighty magnet everywhere and in all ages, drawing men to Christ?

To ask the question, is to answer it. Scarcely had He been lifted up upon the tree, ere that *uplifting* began to draw human hearts to the bleeding, suffering Lamb of God. It won the centurion at the foot of the Cross, whose admiring exclamation was, *“truly this was the Son of God!”* It won the crucified malefactor at His side, who believed in Him when all other faith was dead, who hailed Him as King, even while wearing the crown of thorns, and whose spirit, ere the sun had set, ascended with Jesus to Paradise. It won the heart of Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, his brother counsellor, who came and begged His body, wrapped it in costly spices and linen, and bore it to an honored grave. It won three thousand hearts, between the rising and the setting of a single sun, on that day of Pentecost, when they who were guilty of His blood, found in that blood pardon and peace and cleansing for the soul.

And from that day, the mighty process has gone forward, gathering strength with the lapse of time. “Beginning at Jerusalem,” and extending through all the coasts of Israel, thousands of the tribe of Judah were gathered to this their Shiloh, their long-expected Messiah. And as the apostles and evangelists went throughout the civilized world, this was the secret of their wondrous success. They preached the doctrine of the Cross, salvation through the crucified Redeemer; and it was this which drew the nations to His feet, found a response in unnumbered breasts, and soon filled the Roman Empire with the followers of the Lamb. And in every age and period since, among all tribes and nations of the globe, wherever the Cross has been uplifted, wherever Christ crucified has been simply and faithfully proclaimed, innumerable multitudes have been *drawn* to Him, who “have counted all things but loss,” that they might win Christ. What countless millions now on earth, and what rejoicing hosts of the redeemed in heaven, “whom no man can number,” now stand forth as “a cloud of witnesses” to the fulfillment of the Redeemer’s prophecy as He looked forward to His Cross!

That prediction has been fulfilled in us. There was a time in our history when our hearts were cold and dead to His love, and there was no beauty in Him that our souls desired. Now He is to us “the fairest among ten thousand,” “the pearl of great price,” the rock of our salvation. What has wrought this wondrous change? What has melted our indifference to adoring gratitude and love? One mighty spectacle, the dying Lamb of God, the Lord of glory crucified for us, the matchless love of Jesus, “God in Christ,” bearing our sins in His own body on the tree,” dying, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.”

“His love alone
Has broken every barrier down.”

VI. It is a study of deepest interest to look along the line of the church’s history, and mark how powerfully this great magnet has attracted to Him all that is loftiest and noblest in human character. All along the stream of time, for eighteen centuries, there has sounded, from hymns of praise and wrestlings of prayer, this great response of Christian hearts, *“Unto Him who loved us and gave Himself for us and redeemed us by His blood, be Glory forever!”* Go, search among the dim recesses of the catacombs of ancient Rome, where the early Christians of that city sought refuge from the fury of their persecutors, where they found a sanctuary and a grave; and what name, above all others, everywhere meets your eye, rudely cut into the rock? It is the name of Jesus. *“He sleeps in Jesus;” “she rests in Christ”*—such is the burden of all.

“None, but Christ!” is the silent testimony from the martyr’s resting-place. Take the hymns of the church, from its earliest to its latest period, the truest expression of the *heart* of Christendom; and what strain pervades them all, from the songs of Ephraem the Syrian, through the grand old hymns of the middle ages, like the “Dies Irae” of Thomas De Celano, down to Watts and Wesley, Cowper and Montgomery, but one, the sublime key-note of love to Jesus?

“Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease;
’Tis music in the sinner’s ears,
’Tis life and health and peace.”

And so take the great names of the church, her elect and kingly spirits, and one common feature stamps them all—the heart *drawn* to Christ, by the power of His love—His love unto death. Hear “that disciple whom Jesus loved,” and who leaned upon His bosom, give utterance to the great truth which was the foundation of all his Christian life—*“we love Him because He first loved us!”* Then turn to his very opposite in temperament, the intellectual, logical St. Paul, and ask the secret of his unsurpassed activity and endurance for the Gospel, and this is his reply—*“the love of Christ constraineth me!”* “*To me to live is Christ!*” Then listen to the fervent and impulsive St. Peter, as from a bursting heart he exclaims, *“Lord, Thou, knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love, Thee.”* See the love of Mary of Bethany, as she breaks upon His head the costly box of ointment, not too costly for an expression of her devoted love. Recall the memories of Augustine and the saintly Monica, his mother; or Jerome the monk of Bethlehem; or Thomas a Kempis and Fenelon; or Leighton and Herbert and Ken; or Wesley and Doddridge and Fletcher; or Martyn and Brainerd and Payson; and what makes them all one, kindred by one holy tie? It is love to Christ. It is each heart *drawn to* and fixed on Christ, won by the attractive power of His Cross.

But fulfilled as this prediction has been, in every age and among every generation, there is yet a fulfillment on a far grander scale awaiting the words of Jesus. We cannot believe that all the sublime vision which then passed before the mind of the Redeemer has yet been realized. He is “to see of the travail of His soul, and to be *satisfied*.” And what will satisfy His great heart of love, less than *the drawing of the whole world to His Cross?*

And this is what the sacred writers everywhere teach us will yet take place. “*The whole world shall be filled with His glory*” is the testimony of them all. The Psalmist tells of the day when “the heathen shall be given to Him for His inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for His possession;” and as the glory of that day breaks upon His vision, He pictures the redeemed as the countless dewdrops from the womb of the morning, covering the face of the whole earth with dazzling beauty. And the prophet, as he sees the coming of the day when “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord,” can only portray its majestic grandeur by the image of the ocean’s fullness in its unfathomed depths—*“for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”* The Cross is yet to draw all nations; Christ crucified is yet to win the whole world to a willing obedience. Who can doubt that Jesus, in that hour when He said, “now is my soul troubled,” looked beyond the Cross, and “*despised*” its bitterness and ignominy in “the joy set before Him” of the whole world

filled with converts to His name, every human heart a shrine of love to the Redeemer, every voice joining in the mighty anthem, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain !”

Then “the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.”

“Arabia’s desert ranger
To Him shall bow the knee;
The Ethiopian stranger
His glory come to see.

“ With offerings of devotion,
Ships from the isles shall meet,
To pour the wealth of ocean
In tribute at His feet.

“Kings shall fall down before Him,
And gold and incense bring;
All nations shall adore Him,
His praise all people sing.

“For He shall have dominion
O’er river, sea, and shore;
Far as the eagle’s pinion
Or dove’s light wing can soar.

“ For Him shall prayer unceasing,
And daily vows ascend;
His kingdom still increasing,
A kingdom without end.

“The mountain dews shall flourish,
A seed in weakness sown;
Whose fruit shall spread and flourish,
And shake like Lebanon.

“O’er every foe victorious,
He on His throne shall rest;
From age to age more glorious,
All blessing and all blessed.

“The tide of time shall never
His covenant remove;
His name shall stand forever,
That name to us is Love!”

Glorious as will be this fulfilment of the words of Jesus, may we not believe that they will receive a still sublimer fulfilment? When this world shall have passed away, and the “new heavens and the new earth “shall arise; when all the redeemed, of every age and every land, shall be gathered into the heavenly Jerusalem; when patriarchs and prophets, apostles and evangelists, martyrs and confessors, shall be brought into one eternal home; who but He will be the centre of the mighty multitude, to whom every heart shall turn with rapture and ever-increasing joy? It is the Lamb, whom they will “follow whithersoever He goeth.” “We may believe,” says a plowing writer, “that throughout eternity Christ will continue to *draw* all men to Him; still will He be the point towards which shall converge whatsoever hath been delivered from the consequences of man’s apostasy; still will He be the source of gladness, the wellspring of happiness, to the myriads who have entered heaven through the virtue of His blood; to Him shall the ransomed flock, and around Him shall they congregate, and from Him shall they derive accessions of knowledge and fresh materials of triumph; and this will be the final drawing of the nations. When the men of every age and of every land, linked in indissoluble brotherhood, shall crowd towards the Mediator as their common deliverer, their all in all, and cast their crowns at His feet, and sweep their harps to His praise; oh! then will the prophecy receive its full and splendid accomplishment, and all orders of intelligence, connecting the crucifixion as a cause with this ingathering, will bear its enraptured witness to the thorough verification of the words, “And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.”

A word of explanation, and also of warning, is needed in closing. No passage of the Bible sets forth more fully the universality of the atonement, and of the love of Christ. *‘I will draw all men,’* said the Divine Redeemer; why, then, are not *all hearts* won to Him? Why is there a single soul without the fold of Christ? Alas! He can *only* draw, He cannot *compel*; He can only *attract*, He cannot constrain by force the love of the human heart. Christ died for all; He draws all; He yearns for all; *only those who resist this attraction are excluded from salvation.*

Oh, then! if *this* fail to win the heart, there is nothing else left. Even God Himself can do no more than has been done. The sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross is His mightiest effort; it is love’s costliest gift. In that crowning effort to win the love of man to God, Infinite wisdom and power and love, have exhausted all their resources. And the Divine Father’s great and everlasting challenge to every soul, unsaved at last, will be, *“what more could I have done!”*

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