LOVE TO CHRIST INDISPENSABLE.

~Other Speakers M-R: Edward Payson:

"Jesus with to Simon Peter, Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, feed my lambs."
John 21:15.

have in this chapter a particular account of an interview between our Saviour, and some of his disciples after his resurrection. Of the disciples, present at this interview, Peter was one. The shameful manner in which he had denied his master, you, doubtless, recollect. Though he had unfeignedly repented of his sin, and, in consequence, obtained pardon, his Master thought proper on this occasion to remind him of it again. With this view he addressed to him the question in our text; and as Peter had thrice denied that he knew him, he thrice repeated the question, and thrice drew from him the declaration, Lord thou knowest that I love thee. And you will observe, my hearers, that, while thus examining this backsliding disciple, he asked him no other question. He did not inquire what Peter believed, or whether he had repented; for he well knew that, where love is present, faith and repentance cannot be absent. The question before us is then, evidently, in our Saviour's view, a most important question. And were he now present, it would probably be the only question, or at least, the first question, which he would ask of each of us. If any one present wished for admission to his church, his table, nothing more would be indispensably necessary to his admission, than an ability to answer this question with truth in the affirmative. Nay more, this is, in effect, the only question which Christ will ask us at the judgment day, the question on our answer to which our destiny will depend; for the language of inspiration, the word by which we shall be judged is, Grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity; but if any man love not the Lord Jesus, let him be accursed when the Lord comes; and the Judge himself has expressly declared that no man, who does not love him more than he loves any other object, can be his disciple. My design in the present discourse is, to show why the exercise of supreme love to Christ is thus indispensably necessary to our salvation.
1. The exercise of love to Christ is indispensably necessary, because the want of it proves that we do not, in the smallest degree, resemble him; proves that we are destitute of goodness, and, of course, entirely sinful. It may with truth be asserted, that no man acquainted with the New Testament, who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, can be a good man, or possess the smallest degree of love or desire for goodness. It will be readily allowed that Christ was perfectly good. Every good man will, in some degree, resemble Christ. Now those who resemble each other, will, if they are acquainted, love each other. Place good men in the same town, and as soon as they know each other, they will be friends. Or place them at a distance, and let them become acquainted with each other's character by report, without any personal intercourse; and they will feel a mutual affection and wish to meet. But if all who resemble each other, love each other, then every good man loves good men; much more, will every good man love Christ, who is goodness itself, goodness personified, goodness in its most attractive form. If he loves goodness in the stream, much more will he love it in the fountain. He then who does not love Christ, does not, in any degree, resemble him; does not possess the smallest share of goodness; and, as no one can really desire what he does not love, does not even desire to be good. Agreeably, we find that all good beings in heaven, and on earth, have ever loved Christ, so far as they have had opportunity to become acquainted with his character.
2. Love to Christ is indispensably necessary, because without it we cannot perform those duties which he requires of his disciples and which are necessary to salvation. For instance, we are required to repent of the sin we have committed against him; but to do this without love is evidently impossible. Can you, my hearers, mourn, can you feel truly grieved, in consequence of having offended a person whom you do not love? You may, indeed, feel a selfish sorrow, if you fear that punishment will follow the offence; but this is not that godly sorrow which works repentance, and which Christ requires. No; when a child mourns that he has grieved his parents, it is because he loves them. When you feel grieved in consequence of having offended a friend, it is because he is your friend. Love then, love to Christ, is an essential part of those emotions which the inspired writers call a broken heart and contrite spirit. Again, we are required to believe, to confide, to trust in Christ. But can we confide in a being, can we trust our all for time and eternity in the hands of a being, whom we do not love? Can a dying man commit his immortal soul with pleasure to the care of one whom he does not love? Can we even firmly believe the promises, and rest with implicit confidence on the assurances, of one whom we do not love? Evidently not. Where there is no love, there will be want of confidence, there will be suspicion. Indeed, the only reason why sinners find it so difficult to believe in Christ is, they do not love him.
Farther; we are required to obey the commands of Christ, to be his servants, his subjects. Now obedience to many of his commands, involves the performance of duties which seem disagreeable, and submission to sacrifices, which we are naturally unwilling to make. He commands us, for instance, to deny ourselves, to take up the cross, to crucify our sinful affections and desires, to part with everything cheerfully at his call, to make sacrifices, which he compares to cutting off aright hand and plucking out a right eye. Now we may be willing to do all this for the sake of one whom we supremely love; for love makes hard things easy, and bitter things

sweet. But can any man feel willing to submit to all this for the sake of one whom he does not love? Can any man prefer the interest of Christ to his own, and the honor of Christ to his own reputation, unless he loves Christ more than he loves himself? Yet this Christ expressly requires of all who would be his disciples. In addition to this, we are required to imitate Christ. We are told that he has set us an example that we should follow his steps. But can any one strive to imitate a person whom he does not love? In other words, can he sincerely endeavor to acquire a character with which he is not pleased, in which he sees nothing beautiful or lovely?

Again; we are commanded to rejoice in Christ. Rejoice in the Lord always, says the Apostle, and again I say, rejoice. But how is it possible to rejoice in a being for whom we feel no affection? We can easily rejoice in a friend; but by what unheard of process shall we bring ourselves to rejoice in one whom we do not love? Farther, we are commanded to remember Christ, to commemorate at his table his dying love. But how hard it is to retain in our memories, an object which has no place in our affections. How little pleasure can we find in coming to the table of one whom we regard with indifference? We may indeed, bring our bodies; but our hearts will be absent, and the whole service will be uninteresting to ourselves, and no better than solemn mockery in the estimation of Christ.

Finally, we are commanded to love the friends, the disciples of Christ, and to love them for his sake. But to obey this command without love to Christ is evidently impossible. We cannot love children for the sake of their parents, unless we first love the parents; nor can we love the disciples of Christ for his sake, unless we love Christ himself. It appears, then, that to obey any of Christ's commands without love, is impossible. We may add, that, even if it were possible to obey him without love, our obedience would be unacceptable and worthless; for he searches the heart, he knows what is in man, he cannot be deceived by mere external services and professions, nor is it possible that he should be pleased with them, since he sees them to be insincere.

3. The exercise of supreme love to Christ is indispensably necessary, because without it we cannot relish the society of his disciples, or enjoy communion with them, or consistently unite with them in religious duties. The Apostle John informs those to whom he wrote, that his design in writing his epistle was, to bring others to the enjoyment of fellowship with himself and his fellow disciples. These things declare we unto you that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. Now communion consists in a joint participation of the same views and feelings. That we may enjoy communion with Christians, then, it is necessary that our views and feelings should resemble theirs. But they have exalted views of Christ, and feel supreme love for him. He himself informs us that he has not a disciple in the world, who does not love him more than he loves any other object. How then can one who does not love Christ, relish the society of his disciples, or enjoy communion with them, or unite in their religious services? How unpleasant must be the situation of such a man when surrounded by a circle of lively Christians. Their hearts glow with love to an object in which he sees no beauty. They speak to him of the amiableness and excellence of the Saviour, but he knows not what they mean. Yet he must endeavor to say something, though he has nothing to say; or else maintain a sullen silence, and thus excite doubts of his sincerity. In short, he must feel like a deaf man at a concert of music, or like a blind man in a gallery of pictures, surrounded by others whose senses are gratified and whose admiration is excited. It is the same, when he attempts to unite with Christians in the performance of religious duties. They thank the Saviour, but he feels no gratitude. They praise the Saviour, but he sees nothing to admire; their hearts ascend to heaven on the wings of devotion, but his remains behind. He may indeed find himself able to converse with them on some religious subjects, to contend eagerly for some truths, and to declaim fluently respecting doctrines; but when the beauties and glories of Immanuel are the theme of conversation; when any affection for him is expressed, he must either be silent, or say what his heart does not feel, what it never felt.

Once more; supreme love to Christ is indispensably necessary, because without it we could not possibly be happy in heaven. This, my friends, is capable of strict demonstration. You will allow that no man can be happy who is where he does not wish to be. No man can wish to be in a place where he is separated from all that he loves. But the man who does not love Christ, would find nothing in heaven to love; would find himself separated from all that he loves. All the objects which he ever loved, all the pursuits, employments, and society in which he ever found pleasure, he leaves behind him when he leaves this world. He would, therefore, feel like a stranger in heaven; he would look back to this world as his home; he would wish to return here, for where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also; and as that wish could not be gratified, he would not be happy. But this is not all. To a man who does not love Christ, the society and employments of heaven would appear exceedingly disagreeable. We have already seen that such a man cannot enjoy the society or cordially unite in the devotions of Christians on earth. For similar reasons, he would find it still more difficult to enjoy the society, or join in the praises of heaven. All who reside there love the Saviour perfectly. They feel and express for him the most ardent and intense affection. Their happiness very much consists in seeing, serving, and praising him. Now what happiness could be found in such society and employments, by a man who does not love the Lord Jesus? You well know that nothing can be more irksome, than to praise what we do not admire; to express ardent affection, when we feel the most perfect indifference. Yet this would be the situation of one in heaven, who does not love his Redeemer. He must, through endless ages, praise what he does not admire, and profess

love which he does not feel; and what is still worse, he must utter these praises and professions to one who knows their insincerity. It would be sufficiently painful to flatter one whom we do not love, even if we could deceive him by our flatteries, and induce him to believe we were sincere. But to flatter one whom we cannot deceive; to stand and utter lies to him, while we are conscious that he knows them to be lies, this would be misery indeed. But it is needless to enlarge. Nothing can be more evident than the fact, that a man who does not love Christ supremely would be unhappy in heaven. Indeed every such person, who is at all acquainted with his own heart; must be conscious of the fact. You doubtless recollect the unhappy man who was executed in this town for murder, about ten years since. While in his dungeon, after listening to the description which inspired writers give of heaven, he told me that he should rather remain in that dungeon through eternity, than go to such a heaven as he had heard described. Now I appeal to those of you who do not love the Lord Jesus, whether your feelings are not in some degree at least similar to his? If you hesitate to admit this, permit me to make the following supposition. Suppose some town in our country should be made, as nearly as possible, to resemble heaven. Suppose all the inhabitants without exception, to be, not only pious, but eminently so. Suppose all worldly amusements, all political discussions, all commercial transactions, all secular conversation, to be banished from among them; while the presence of Christ should be enjoyed in a peculiar manner, and all the employment should be to love and praise and serve him? Would you joyfully choose that town, in preference to all other places, for your earthly residence? Could you, while retaining your present character, while destitute of the love of Christ, cheerfully leave everything behind, and live happily in such a place? If you reply, No, then is it much more evident that you could not be happy in heaven. If you reply, Yes, we could be happy in such a situation, — I ask, why then do you not, so far as is possible, live such a life of religion here? Why are not those who appear to love Christ most sincerely, and to praise him most ardently, your chosen companions? In a word, if you could be happy in heaven, why do you not seek happiness by living a heavenly life on earth?

From what has been said you may learn, my hearers, why the inspired writers lay so much stress on the exercise of love to Christ; why he requires it of all his disciples. It is not for his own sake. It is not because our love can add any thing to his happiness. But it is because that, unless we love him, we are destitute of goodness, and of all love and desire for goodness; and are unable to obey his commands, to enjoy communion with his people, or to be happy with him in heaven. The commands which require us to love Christ are not then mere arbitrary commands; but are founded in the nature of things, and obedience to them is necessary.

From this subject we may learn,

1. In what respects many characters highly esteemed among men are deficient, essentially deficient, in the sight of God. I allude to persons whose dispositions appear to be amiable, whose morals are correct, whose religious opinions are perhaps agreeable to truth, and who pay a decent respect, to religious institutions. Can you not easily conceive, my friends, that a man may possess all these qualities and yet be destitute of love to Christ? Do you not know among your acquaintances many persons who have pleasing manners, amiable dispositions, and who live moral lives, and yet do not appear to feel any love to Christ? Are there not some such persons among your acquaintances, whom you would be surprised to hear speaking of the Saviour with affectionate warmth, or expressing grief for having neglected him, or urging others to love him? Do you not perceive that a great alteration must take place even in these moral, amiable persons, before they can sincerely adopt the language, in which Paul and other primitive Christians express their affection for the Saviour; and still more, before they can cordially unite with the redeemed in crying, Worthy is the Lamb to receive glory, and honor, and power, and blessing? If so, you surely cannot blame us for asserting that something more than morality is necessary; that a man may be what is called a good moral man, and yet be no Christian; and that a radical change of heart is necessary to moral men, as well as to immoral and profane. Nor will you complain if, adopting the language of the poet, we exclaim,

"Talk they of morals? O thou bleeding Lamb!
Thou Maker of new morals for mankind; —
The grand morality is love of thee."

The young ruler mentioned in the gospel appears to have possessed all the qualities mentioned above; but yet he lacked one thing, essential to his Maker’s approbation, and his own happiness.

2. Is the question in our text the great important question which Christ addresses to all, and on our ability to answer which satisfactorily every thing depends? Permit me, then, to address this question to everyone who wishes to ascertain the reality of his title to an admission into Christ’s visible church, to an approach to his table, to the heavenly inheritance. Does any one present wish to know whether he is prepared for admission to the visible church? Christ, who keeps the door, says to him, Lovest thou met If thou dost, enter freely. Does any one already in the church, who has lost his first love, or practically denied his master, wish to know whether he is forgiven, whether, notwithstanding this conduct, Christ will make him welcome to his table? The only question to be answered is, Lovest thou me? And if any one wishes to know whether he is prepared for heaven, the question is still the same. Will you say, it is impossible for anyone to answer this question decisively? It appears from our text, that this is a mistake. Peter could say to his heart-searching Lord, when his penetrating eye was fixed full upon him, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. If Peter could thus certainly know, and

confidently assert, that he loved Immanuel; all who sincerely love him may say the same, unless their love is so faint that they cannot perceive it. And O how happy is the man who can truly say this! With what delight must he approach Christ's table! With what confidence can he meet death! with what triumphant joy may he join with the Apostle in exclaiming, —I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.