

CHAPTER X

GOD'S SURPRISES

"And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed."—Gen. xlviii. 11.

ONE of the most potent elements in human life is that of surprise. Its value and importance are very evident, for from early years to old age it plays a great part in the experience of mankind. How we delight to surprise little children with new gifts and pleasures! With what perennial interest the visits of Santa Claus are anticipated! With what glad surprise we receive good news, and with what pleasure we plan surprises on birthdays and at Christmas time! Parent and child, husband and wife, friend and friend, all use and delight to use this element of surprise.

This influence is not lost in the higher sphere of spiritual realities. It enters into every Christian experience. God knows the power of surprise, and with deepest reverence we may say that He delights to surprise and astonish His people in manifold ways. When He gave His only Begotten Son for the life of the world He gave mankind the greatest possible surprise, for whether we think of the life, or the teaching, or the in-

fluence of our Lord, we are face to face with the perpetual surprise of the ages. And now day by day in that "unspeakable gift" every believer is continually being surprised by God with marvellous gifts of grace.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS
ASSOCIATED WITH DEFINITE SURPRISES

The weary soul at that time has but one thought, the burden of sin and the desire to get rid of it. Convicted of personal guilt, the heart knows its own bitterness and is conscious of the Divine condemnation. Like Christian, when he passed through the wicket gate, the one overmastering thought is, how to get rid of the terrible burden. The Christian life commences with the removal of that burden as the soul looks to Calvary, and looking, becomes conscious of pardon and deliverance. But instead of pardon only, the penitent soul finds very much more, for with the pardon comes a sense of peace and rest, and a consciousness of a reconciliation with God. Nor is this all, for there is also a delightful sense of freedom and liberty, together with a wondrous experience of joy. Even these things are not the whole, for there comes into the soul a blessed consciousness of the presence of God, and with this the gift of His indwelling Spirit. Thus the soul at the very

outset is surprised and astonished beyond measure at the Divine bounty to one whose only thought was riddance of a terrible burden. Like the thief on the cross, who expected some future deliverance when the Lord should come into His kingdom, and was surprised with a present, immediate blessing, "To-day thou shalt be with me," so now the believing heart finds a succession of surprises at the very commencement of its Christian career. The Queen of Sheba received at Solomon's hand not only "all her desire," but also, in addition, "that which he gave her of his royal bounty." In like manner, to our great and overwhelming surprise, we are not only reconciled, but "much more, being reconciled," we are conscious of abundant mercy and grace, and the soul "transported with the view," is "lost in wonder, love, and praise."

**THE COURSE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A CONSTANT
SUCCESSION OF SURPRISES**

One of the first deep needs of the Christian life is *Knowledge*. The great commission of our Lord to His Church included not only preaching and baptising, but "teaching," and the new-born soul needs guidance and knowledge from the very first. In the old days of spiritual darkness the Bible was felt to be an uninteresting and dry record, but now the Holy Spirit has given new sight to the soul

and sheds new light on the Word. The Bible becomes a new book, and the constant prayer of the young Christian is, Lord, teach me. As the days go on this prayer is answered in an ever-increasing experience of the joy and inspiration of Holy Scripture in its application to the soul, until the believer can take the words of the psalmist as his own and say, "I rejoice in Thy Word as one that findeth great spoil." He can even say, "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my study." With the prophet Jeremiah he can add, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and they were to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." As experience deepens, the soul realises that the Master has "many things to say" to us; our constant prayer is, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth," and our exultant testimony is, "Who teacheth like Him?"

Another need of the Christian life is *Grace*, and here again our experience is one of continual surprise. When our Christian life commences it is probably true to say that our hopes are bounded by the one thought of doing right and avoiding past sins and errors, but the Lord gives very much more than this. Like Jacob, in our text, as he looked back over the past, we become conscious of the Apostolic truth that "He giveth more grace," and "of His fulness" we are continually receiving, and "grace for grace." Like David (2 Samuel

vii. 18, 19), we not only rejoice in what we have, but in adoring thankfulness we say, "Thou hast spoken of Thy servant's house for a great while to come." We learn the secret of that frequently-repeated New Testament phrase "much more," and this becomes the keynote of our experience. We started with praise and thanks to God as the One "Who forgiveth all our sins," but we go on to experience Him as the One "Who healeth all our diseases, Who redeemeth our life from destruction, Who crowneth us with tender mercies and loving-kindnesses, and satisfieth our mouth with good things." Again and again we have the promise and find it blessedly true in our lives, "The Lord shall open unto thee His good treasure," and day by day we receive "abundance of grace in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus."

Yet another characteristic of the true Christian life is *Fellowship*. Of necessity this is but dimly realised at first, but the consciousness grows as our spiritual life deepens. At first we are like the disciples at Emmaus who invited our Lord to be their guest, but the Lord soon becomes the Host and we the guests. When the Lord first comes into the soul the word is, "I will sup with him," but the positions soon change, and we experience the other part of the great promise, "and he with Me." Day by day He surprises His people with fuller revelations of Himself and of their priv-

ileges and joys in Him. Union and communion become intensified, and while in the old days we were "far off" we are now not only "made nigh," but are citizens of the kingdom, members of the household, children of the Family, "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." We realise God's ideal for us in fellowship with Himself. God's purpose is not only salvation or even life, but these as the means of fellowship. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ." This is made ours by "the fellowship of the Holy Ghost," and day by day this fellowship deepens and grows and becomes more precious.

"The love of Jesus, what it is,
None but His loved ones know."

**THE CROWN OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE WILL BE FULL
OF MARVELLOUS SURPRISES**

The future state itself will be a surprise. Heaven has been well defined as "the sweet surprise of a perfect explanation." Already, in the mercy and grace of God, we are His children, but "it doth not yet appear what we shall be," and when it does appear the glory will be astonishing. The results of the present life as then revealed will also be great surprise. When the King sits on His throne and before Him are gathered all

nations and He shall say, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat," those who are thus addressed will answer in astonishment, "Lord, *when saw we Thee an hungered?*" They cannot realise what this means, and to what in their past life it refers. No work for God is ever lost, no service for Him can possibly be forgotten. When the books are opened every detail and impression will be found recorded, and then we shall know in reality what life has been.

The greatest surprise of all will be the Master Himself. Far beyond our dreams and highest conceptions will be the sight of the glory of our Redeemer. "We shall see Him as He is," and that sight will be glorious in all the marvel of its Divine and perpetual surprise.

God thus delights to encourage our faith, rejoice our love, and inspire our hope by the surprises of His mercy, grace and blessing. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Yet even here and now God reveals very much of this Divine provision by His Holy Spirit, and it is one of the sources of joy in the present life that God is always preparing some delightful surprise for His children. Much more will it be true in the life to come that Heaven and all its treasures

will be one constant succession of surprises to the people of God. Indeed, it will be one of the glories and joys of eternity to realise that there will never come a time when God will have nothing else to show us or nothing else to give us. As the finite ever approaches nearer the Infinite, more and more of the Divine holiness, grace, and glory will be discovered to the never-ending praise of His grace.

This is a call to *accept* the Lord Jesus now as a personal Saviour and so to begin this life of perpetual and increasing surprise. All God's gifts are stored in Christ, and from the moment we receive Him into our hearts we find the gradual unfolding of every power and blessing stored up in Him.

Is not this also a call to *enjoy* these gifts of grace? The Christian life is intended to be joyous, enjoyed and enjoyable. By trust and obedience, by surrender and service, by listening and learning, by hearkening and heeding, loyalty to God will bring with it the fulness of the Holy Spirit, and with this all else will follow.

Then, too, we must take care to *share* these surprises and pass on the blessings to others. The Apostle bids the Christians of Ephesus to be "imitators of God," and we cannot do better than imitate God in this matter of providing surprises for those around us. In the home, among our friends,

with our acquaintances, in the church and social circles, we shall find many an opportunity of preparing surprises by acts of kindness, loving words, and pleasing actions, thus adding to our own joy as we afford continual enjoyment to others.

Above all, let us ever *expect* to receive more and more of these surprises at the hands of God. His word to us is, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, saith the Lord." "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil," and so the believer can look up and say, "How precious are Thy thoughts unto me, O God!" We review the past and our testimony is, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." We look around on the present and we seek His grace to show "how great things the Lord hath done for us," and as we look forward to the future we hear the Master say, "Believest thou this? Thou shalt see greater things than these," for "He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" through Jesus Christ our Lord.