

CHAPTER V

"I SERVE"

"I am among you as he that serveth."—Luke xxi. 27.
"Ye serve the Lord Christ."—Col. iii. 24.

THE motto of the Prince of Wales is a short but very expressive one: "I serve." At first sight it may seem peculiar that "I serve" should be the motto of a prince, but a prince is never more really a prince than when he is giving himself to the service of others. The true prince is a servant. The true servant is a prince. The highest position in life is not only not demeaned by being employed for the good of others, but, on the contrary, it is dignified and glorified by service for God and man.

Service is one of the primary objects of Christianity. All the blessings and privileges of the Gospel of Christ are intended for the purpose of promoting the glory of God and the good of man by means of true service. "That we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve . . ." (Luke i. 74).

There is, however, something far higher than this. Our Lord Himself became a "Servant" in order to be our Saviour. In the Old Testament

our Lord is called "the Servant of Jehovah," and in the New Testament He is described as having taken "the form of a servant." In order to do the will of God and redeem mankind, it was necessary for Him to humble Himself and become a "Servant," so that along the pathway of service He might come to that Cross which was at once the exemplification of devoted duty, redeeming grace, and Divine love.

This revelation of our Lord as the true Servant is specially connected with the prophecy of Isaiah. The figure of the Servant of Jehovah in Isaiah xl.-lxvi. is the unique and magnificent contribution of that evangelical prophet to the prophetic revelation of the Messiah. In a series of chapters, from xli.-liii. various aspects of the Servant are brought before us; He is a Divine Messenger, a Prophetic Witness, a Suffering Martyr, a Sacrificial Victim, and a Victorious King. Yet in all these offices He is essentially and predominantly the Servant.

This idea of the Messiah as Servant finds its beautiful fulfilment in the New Testament in the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Man and Son of God. From His earliest recorded word, "I must be about My Father's business," we have illustration after illustration of our Lord as the Servant of God. "I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but to do the will of Him that sent Me"; "The Son of Man came not to be

ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." And in the earliest New Testament Christology, in the Acts of the Apostles immediately after Pentecost, the prevailing conception of the exalted Christ in the minds of those early Christians is that of the Servant of the Lord (Acts iv. 27, 30).

This conception of our Lord as the Servant of Jehovah is necessarily something far more and deeper than a mere picture or revelation of Divine love and perfect service. It is intended to have a practical effect on all who profess and call themselves followers of Christ. The "Servant of God" is the Master of men, and His Service which wrought their salvation also bought their lives; and now the Apostolic word says: "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20).

What, then, are His claims on His followers? We will answer this question in one sentence, and then illustrate the answer in various ways from the Word of God. What are His claims? Every *fact* in the *life* of Christ is intended to be a *factor* in the life of Christians. Of these facts we shall mention nine, which are nine stages in the revelation of Christ, and then try to show how these constitute nine factors and make a ninefold claim

on our lives. Every fact conveys a truth, and every truth makes a claim. Each of these facts carries a revelation, and each revelation is intended to elicit a response in our lives.

OUR LORD'S INCARNATION

The Incarnation is a revelation of *Supreme Condescension*. "Who, being in the form of God, counted not equality with God a thing to be retained as a prize, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man; and being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself."

This stupendous act of Divine condescension makes a very definite claim upon us, and calls for a response of *Deepest Humility*. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Humility of mind, heart, and soul is one of the fundamental requirements of true Christianity. Augustine was asked: "What is the first step to heaven?" He answered: "Humility." "And the second step?" "Humility." "And the third step?" "Humility." Humility has been well defined by Caroline Fry, in her invaluable little book *Christ our Example*, as "unconscious self-forgetfulness." Mark the force and depth in that thought of the unconsciousness of our humility, for conscious hu-

mility is none other than the most terrible form of pride. The servant of God who realises most fully what His Master did in becoming incarnate will ever remember that unconscious self-effacement is the one great requisite of all true work for God. "He must increase, but I must decrease."

OUR LORD'S EARTHLY MINISTRY

The earthly ministry is a revelation of *Devoted Work*. Our Lord inaugurated His ministry by His act of consecration in the rite of baptism, with its keynote, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," and all through the three years, service for God was the dominant note. His preaching, His miracles, His training of the twelve Apostles, all meant work. The entire picture of Jesus in the Gospel of St. John is that of One Whose supreme desire and determination were to do the will of God. "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day" was His constant thought, until at the end He is able to say, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do."

This revelation makes its claim upon us, and is intended to elicit a response of *Whole-hearted Consecration*. "For their sakes I consecrate Myself, that they may be consecrated through the Truth." The Lord's earthly ministry is a call to steadfast

purpose, to strenuous endeavour, and to genuine work for our Master.

"That all our powers with all their might,
In His sole glory may unite."

OUR LORD'S EXAMPLE

Christ's example is a revelation of *Perfect Manhood*. It was the manifestation of what human nature was intended to be, and what it can be by the grace of God. "Who did no sin." This is the negative aspect of His example. "I do always those things which please Him." This is the positive side. The absence of sin and the presence of righteousness are God's purpose for us also, and this revelation of our Lord's perfect life makes a claim on us, and is intended to elicit a response of *Holy Character*. "Leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps." Conduct is the expression of character, character is the result of goodness, and goodness is the outcome of continual contact with God. "He was a good man," is the highest tribute paid, or possible to be paid, to anyone. "The fruit of the Spirit is goodness," and nothing can make up for the lack of this all-embracing element. Orthodoxy, privilege, opportunity, are all intended only as means towards goodness, and the example of our Lord is a stand-

ing testimony to the demand for and possibility and power of holiness of life and goodness of character.

OUR LORD'S DEATH

His death is a revelation of *Unutterable Love*. The Lord's death is first and foremost an atoning sacrifice, and as such is absolutely unique; but there are aspects of this death which we are called to imitate. As a revelation of love it makes a claim upon us, and is intended to elicit a response of *Grateful Self-sacrifice*. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Here is the great obligation, "We ought"; here is the great source of that great obligation, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." In the death of our Lord we have the highest expression of love; "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." That love binds us to Him with cords of devotion. "We love, because He first loved us" (R.V.), and in loving service even unto death we shall "fill up that which is behind in the afflictions of Christ for His body's sake, the Church," and reveal to the world the greatest of all powers, the power of loving self-sacrifice.

OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION

His resurrection is a revelation of *Absolute Lordship*. He was thereby "declared to be the Son of God with power." The Servant of God becomes the Lord of man, and this revelation makes its claim upon us, and is intended to elicit a response of *Unquestioning Obedience*. "To this end, Christ both died and rose again and revived, that He might be Lord." Through that Resurrection, and because of it, we are to yield Him our unquestioning allegiance and entire obedience. "Jesus Christ our Lord" is the favourite designation of the Apostle Paul, "My Lord and my God" is the adoring submissive confession of Thomas. "Lord and Saviour" is Peter's repeated title of his Master. "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am." So He is; and as we realise this and yield Him our loving loyalty, we shall find the peace and joy, the power and blessing of the resurrection of Him Whom God hath raised up as the Servant of Jehovah, the Lord of Mankind.

OUR LORD'S ASCENSION

The Ascension is a revelation of *Heavenly Provision*. It was the closing and crowning act of Our Lord's earthly Work, and His entrance upon the larger sphere of heavenly service on our behalf.

Though He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, it does not mean that He is inactive or at ease in that exalted position. He ascended as Priest; He abides there as Priest and King. This revelation makes a claim upon us, and is intended to elicit a response of *Spiritual Fellowship*. The Ascension means entrance into the holiest, not only for our Lord, but for us. It means access, liberty, fellowship, power, and blessing; and hence the Epistle to the Hebrews can say: "We have a great High Priest; therefore let us hold fast," "We have a High Priest; therefore let us come boldly." "We have a High Priest; therefore let us draw near, let us hold fast, let us consider one another." The fact that through the Ascension we have all these privileges and blessings should be the means and incentive to spiritual blessing, spiritual fellowship, and spiritual influence. We rob ourselves of blessing, strength, and joy if we do not see in the fact of the Ascension not merely the opportunity of complete spiritual provision, but an absolute duty to appropriate and use that provision for the illumination and satisfaction of our lives.

OUR LORD'S PENTECOSTAL GIFT

Pentecost is a revelation of *Supernatural Power*. On the day of Pentecost came the gift of the risen Christ, and this meant spiritual power. "Having

received of the Father the promise of the Spirit, He hath shed forth this," and the revelation of Pentecost makes its claim upon us, and is intended to elicit a response of *Absolute Dependence*. Pentecost means power to live, to labour, to love; power to work, to witness, to wait; power to serve, to stand, to suffer; power "to resist, to insist, to persist"; power, if needs be, to die. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." The provision of Pentecost is ample; and if we are straitened it is in ourselves, not in Him. The gift of the Spirit means provision for every need and every emergency. It means that Our Lord's Divine Power has provided for us all things that pertain to life, godliness and service, and that there is no excuse for barrenness or unfruitfulness. Work done in the energy of the flesh or in the power of a mere human enthusiasm will fail, but work done in the power of the Spirit will abide and abound and glorify God; and if we would realise this, and rest entirely for all holiness and all service on the gift of the exalted Christ, our lives would be "satisfied with favour, full with the blessing of the Lord," and "thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

OUR LORD'S PRESENT LIFE IN HEAVEN

The present life of our Lord in Heaven is a revelation of His *Perpetual Presence*. Most mod-

ern Lives of Christ begin with Bethlehem and end at Olivet, but the New Testament begins earlier and continues later. There is nothing more definite, clear and unmistakable in the New Testament than the truth of our Lord's present life and service in heaven. His work on earth is finished, but not so His work in heaven. He intercedes, He bestows the Spirit, He guides the Church, He is interested in individuals, He uses His people, He controls affairs. We hear a great deal of going "Back to Christ." The truer expression is "Up to Christ"; to the Christ on the throne—the living, exalted, and ever-present Lord. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles is really the Book of the Acts of the Ascended Christ; and this revelation of our Lord's perpetual presence makes its claim upon us, and is intended to elicit a response of *Evangelistic Enterprise*. It is the claim upon us to evangelise the world, to preach the Gospel to every creature. He said, "Lo, I am with you always," and because of this we are commanded to go into all the world. And so we read of those earliest disciples that "they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them." This is our highest warrant, our complete justification, our adequate guarantee, our perfect power for world-wide missionary work, the presence with us of the loving and Divine Lord. How can we, how dare we shrink from the fulfilment of His great mission,

when He has provided for us all things that pertain to the fulfilment of His own command! How can we talk of retrenchment when "all things are ours" and "all power" is given to Christ for us?

OUR LORD'S SECOND COMING

We may call this a "fact" because of its certainty. Prophecy is history written beforehand. With God promise is reality, truth is fact. His Second Coming is a revelation of *Eternal Kingship*. In the coming of the Lord is the hope of the world. It is not the "larger hope" but the "blessed hope" that is the true and substantial hope of God's people and all humanity; and this revelation of eternal Kingship makes its claim upon us, and is intended to elicit a response of *Joyful Confidence*. We are to live and work in the light of this glorious day. It will give tone and power to our service, it will save us from despair, it will give fibre and force to all our endeavours, it will make us radiantly optimistic and never gloomily pessimistic. Not for an instant must we ever be discouraged, even by the gravest problems in the present condition of the world. "He must reign, He will reign, He shall reign." There must be no looking backward, even to what are called the "good old days." Doubtless they were good old days; but as God is true, as Christ is real, as the

Spirit is powerful, the present days are better, and the best are yet to come. Never must we tremble for the ark of God, though we may well tremble for everything else. "Cease ye from man," and live and work only in the light of that "glorious day that is coming by-and-by."

These nine facts should constitute powerful factors in our lives. Each one by itself is strong, and might well have been taken as the topic for a prolonged Bible study and meditation, but it is also wise and necessary to dwell upon them together in summary form, in order to show that their force is cumulative, and absolutely overwhelming. Our Lord's claim upon us presses us at every point. The Incarnation calls for lowliness; the Ministry calls for labour; the Example calls for likeness; the Death calls for love; the Resurrection calls for loyalty; the Ascension calls for liberty; and the present Life in heaven, with the perpetual gift of Pentecost, provides life, full, free, and abundant, as we live in the light of the promise of the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour.

What, then, shall be our response to this marvellous claim? The world and the Church wait to see something of the infinite possibilities of the life of the true Christian. Four great words of the New Testament surely sum up our responsibility. Be it ours to realise them in all their fulness of meaning. "I should"; "I ought"; "I must"; "I

will." That is, I am *inclined* to respond, I am *impelled* to respond, I am *compelled* to respond, I am *determined* to respond. Be it ours to follow the great Apostle, who could first say, "I am debtor," and then, "I am ready." Be it ours to remember what the mother of our Lord said to the servants: "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." Be it ours to say what David's followers said to their Master: "Thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint."