

The Blessing of Levi

Deuteronomy 33: 8-11

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THE history of Levi affords a striking illustration of the grace of God. This will be made abundantly clear by a comparison of Genesis 49: 5-7, and Deut 33: 8-11. No more striking contrast could be furnished than is afforded by these two passages. In the former Jacob says, "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto to their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." How different the blessing wherewith Moses, the man of God, blessed them, as recorded in Deut 33: 8-11. While Jacob says, "Come not thou into their secret," Moses says, "Let Thy Thummim and Thy Urim be with Thy holy one," the very means by which secrets were revealed, and all were glad to come into their secret. Instead of being characterized by "self-will" as Jacob describes them, they are styled God's "holy one." Jacob says further, "Instruments of cruelty are in their habitations." Afterwards, as we learn from the book of Numbers, they had charge of all the instruments and vessels connected with God's habitation; and again, while Jacob says, "Unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united," afterwards they became the leaders of the assembly in the wilderness and had the oversight of the tabernacle. Truly, "where sin abounded grace did much more abound."

Moreover, Simeon and Levi are linked together in Gen 49. Not so in Deut 33. In one passage the people are viewed according to nature, in the other according to grace. According to nature, Simeon and Levi were "brethren"—brethren in character and wickedness. Both are equally guilty, a curse rests upon each alike, and they are subject to the same threat, "I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel."* The way in which this was carried out shows the marvellous character of God's distinguishing grace. When we come to Deut. xxxiii, where all the tribes are blessed, we look in vain for any mention of Simeon—the name even does not appear, while Levi, once partner with Simeon in crime, is given the supreme place of honour. They are both indeed divided and scattered, but how differently; in Levi's case it is only that God may do something better for them than for any of the other tribes. They had no inheritance in Israel, but God says of them, "And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the first-born . . . therefore the Levites shall be mine" They had the nearest place to the tabernacle, they were appointed to the service of the sanctuary, and the priestly family was of their tribe. What a difference between nature and grace! Truly the first shall be last, and the last first.

Such a picture of grace has indeed striking lessons for us, which we shall do well to ponder. But not only does Levi furnish a wonderful example of grace, in them we see the special characteristics which must mark any company that seeks to be here for God. It is in this light we desire to look at them at the present time. There never was a moment, perhaps, when we needed so much to be reminded of what should be the features of a company God can recognise, and to which He can grant His support. We believe the details respecting Levi given us in Deut. xxxiii, furnish a divine programme for a company God would like to have on earth to-day. Our object is not to answer the question, Is there such a company? but only to point out what must be its characteristics.

The first thing mentioned in connection with Levi is the Thummim and Urim. "Let Thy Thummim and Urim be with Thy holy one." It is well-known that secrets were revealed and

God's mind declared through this mysterious agency. How it was done may be a matter of conjecture. The following account, however, of their meaning and use, which is from a Jewish source, is at least interesting, and carries with it some amount of probability. Urim means lights or illuminators. It was a lamp with twelve lights put into the breastplate and behind the four rows of stones, so that the stones were illuminated by it and shone with great brilliancy. It will be remembered that the names of the twelve tribes were engraved on the stones. These names contained all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet except four. Therefore another stone was made containing the four missing letters. This was called Thummim, meaning "completers" or "perfecters," as they helped to make up the complete alphabet. The way in which anything was made known was this; it was done by means of the letters that composed the names with the addition of the four missing letters. In order that the High Priest might know which letters to take they were darkened, and the sum of the letters made up the communication that was desired.

This unique honour belonged only to the priest, and, therefore, to the tribe of Levi, from which the priestly family came. Consequently, in blessing the tribes of Israel, Moses connects the Thummim and Urim with Levi. What we learn from this is that light was granted to this company, and this is assuredly what will distinguish any company to-day to whom the special grace is accorded by God of being here for Him. It was so in the early days of the church's history and it will be so to-day, for whatever may happen during a dispensation, God never deserts those who stand for Him, and, therefore, whatever grace characterizes the dispensation will not be withheld to-day from those that seek God, though it may be given in a modified form. Thus, what marked the early days was *light*. The Lord said to His disciples *privately*, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see; for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them." (Luke 10: 23-24). And again, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but I have called you friends; *for all things* that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you." Nor was this limited to our Lord's sojourn on earth. Rather the reverse; for it was intimated that when the Holy Ghost came a fuller revelation would be given. Jesus said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." Accordingly we find when the Holy Ghost came the Apostles knew exactly what their mission and message were. On the day of Pentecost Peter knew what to say to the assembled multitude, he was not left to cast about for a speech. When arraigned before the high priest and elders of the people they knew what attitude to assume and what words to utter. Peter knew that Ananias had lied to the Holy Ghost. Stephen, before the council, in reviewing the entire history of Israel, knows how to enlarge upon certain points while omitting others, and is led to dwell at length upon the experience of Joseph and Moses, both deliverers raised up by God, and both rejected in the first instance, as examples of what had now taken place in the rejection of the Messiah, and in the end, just before passing off the scene, it is granted to him to look into heaven itself and see Jesus standing on the right hand of God. So all through the history given us in the Acts—whether it is Peter in the house of Cornelius; or Barnabas and Saul separated for the work whereunto the Holy Ghost had called them; or the question of circumcision; or, where to preach—all tends to show that God's mind was made known in the church. Paul could say unhesitatingly to the elders of Ephesus that they would see his face no more, while Agabus

signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world, and predicted that the Jews would bind Paul and deliver him to the Gentiles; both of which came to pass. And, lastly, passing from the Acts to the Revelation, we read, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, *to show unto His servants* things which must shortly come to pass." Closing with "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches." Truly the church had great light, the "illuminators" and "perfecters" were doing their work, for the Holy Ghost was present and the command was, "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

The question may now be asked, "Is that light, or anything approaching it, granted to the church to-day as a whole, or to any portion of it?" There is surely no difficulty in answering the first part of it. We look in vain for such light, or, such communications, even in a limited degree, in the professing church as a whole. Darkness rather than light characterizes by far the larger portion of Christendom. The church has grown corrupt, its abominations in some quarters have long been notorious, and even the light granted at that glorious epoch of the Reformation has long been on the wane. And yet God has not left His people—He has granted light. Some seventy years ago He was pleased again to send out His light and His truth so that many were led to a clearer apprehension of divine things in relation to ministry, worship, the presence of the Holy Ghost, and the proper character and calling of the church. The truth made known was in advance even of that which was recovered through the instrumentality of Luther and others of his day, so that more lucid views of scripture in its bearing upon past, present and future dispensations were set forth than had been the case probably since the early days of the church. One truth after another long forgotten, or lost sight of, was recovered, and not only were individual souls brought into the enjoyment of greater spiritual liberty than had been known for a very long time, but the true relationship of Christians to Christ as head, and to one another as members of "one body," was recognised, and those who saw this truth were led to meet together, the only membership acknowledged being membership of the body of Christ.

Is it any wonder that Satan soon made a direct attack upon this work of God? He did not like to see Christians rejoicing in the knowledge of forgiveness of sins and the liberty of sonship, and escaping from all that sectarian spirit, as well as formality of worship, that so characterizes Christendom. He caused division, and division upon division. We do not enter here upon the merits of the questions raised at such times. That some were conflicts for the truth, while others might, with a little more lowliness and love, have been avoided, most, doubtless, would now be prepared to admit. To re-open these matters now and readjust them is hopeless. Yet the fact remains, well known to all who are acquainted with the inner life of the church, that a distinct revival such as we have described has taken place during the past seventy years; and this fact—well-attested and indisputable—gives rise to two very pertinent questions:— First: What is the responsibility of the church as a whole in regard to it? Second: What is the responsibility of those who have been identified with this testimony God has given?

Our principal concern is with the latter question. As to the former it may safely be said in regard to the church as a whole its responsibility is great. If God gives light, it is for all; and none can ignore it with impunity. It cannot be denied that at the time already referred to, God

did in a remarkable way give many in different places, and sometimes without any interchange of thought, to see the same truths, truths long unrecognised, sometimes even denied, though lying on the very surface of scripture; that God did raise up gifted and able men, men who were not only students of scripture, but scholars also, capable of making known these truths in a form that claimed the attention of every class and community; and lastly, God did cause many to hear and receive their testimony and act accordingly. And the question is: What has the church as a whole done in regard to it? Looking back we can only say the church has neglected its opportunity. And the result? The result will be greater darkness than ever. Is it not already seen in the great increase of ritualism on the one hand, and rationalism on the other?

Now for the second question, as to the responsibility of those who have accepted the light. What a favour to have it! When Moses said of Levi, "Let Thy Thummim and Thy Urim be with Thy holy one," he could not have desired for them a higher favour. And yet that light grew dim in Israel and passed away, as it did afterwards in the church. The solemn consideration is that though light has been granted again it may again pass away. Those who have light must value it if they are to retain it? Do not let them refuse more, but on no account let them lose what they have. "Hold fast that which thou hast that no man take thy crown." Has there not been a tendency of late to grow dissatisfied with truths that have long been accepted and have to do with the foundations of our relationship with God, and a too ready acceptance of what is novel? May God grant us grace to "prove all things and *hold fast* that which is good."

There are, however, other features in connection with Levi's blessing coincident with what we might expect to find marking any company to-day that has received grace from God to be here according to His mind. We refer to the character of those to whom the Thummim and Urim were committed. Not losing sight of the fact, of course, that this special favour was actually granted only to the priestly family, though mentioned here in connection with the tribe of Levi. But how important to see with whom the Thummim and Urim were to be. "With *Thy holy one*, whom Thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom Thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah. Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed Thy word, and kept Thy covenant/'

We do well to ponder these words, "Thy Holy One." Only those who are in moral accord with God can sustain any testimony for Him here, or expect to know His mind. In the case of Levi we learn from Exodus 37: 25-29, how it was Moses could thus speak of them. In the midst of apostacy they boldly declared themselves on the Lord's side. In response to Moses' appeal we read, "And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, 'Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.' And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, 'Consecrate yourselves this day to the Lord, even every man upon his son and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day.'"

God will be sanctified in them that come nigh Him, and no company to-day could expect God's

support and blessing except one that is separated from all that is dishonouring to His name. Separation is often very trying and testing. It proved so in the case of Levi. What could be more trying than the circumstances in which they found themselves The whole nation was bowing down to the golden calf—even Aaron being carried away—and there stood one man alone for God, saying, “Who is on the Lord’s side? *let him come unto me.*” Levi responded. This was no light thing. They had to take a stand outside the existing order of things; they had to leave the majority and join the minority, and more trying than all, they had to put every man his sword by his side, and rising above all the feelings of nature, execute judgment upon those nearest and dearest to them. It is to this no doubt Moses refers in blessing them when he says, “ Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children.” But if separation is trying, the blessing is correspondingly great. To be separated from the rest of the tribes in order to be nearer than any other to God’s dwelling; to be the only ones to come near the tabernacle to do any service; alone to be the bearers of the holy vessels when the camp moved forward; to have no inheritance among the children of Israel, but to know that God was their part and their inheritance; to teach Jacob His judgment, and Israel His law; to put incense before Him and whole burnt offering upon His altar—these were some of the blessings of those who at all cost separated themselves unto the Lord.

Has nothing of this sort been seen in later years? Have there not been those who heard a voice—the voice of One greater than Moses—saying unto them, “ These things saith He that is holy, He that is true,” and did they not leave what was unholy and untrue, and find in truth there was an open door which no man could shut, and of whom it could be said, as of Levi of old, they have kept My word and not denied My name. And have they not been blessed? Yes, how richly! in learning what depth of meaning there is in those words, “ Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

If such favor has been granted in recent years— and we doubt not it has—how long will it continue? *Just so long as the description given of Levi, is descriptive of the company to which reference has just been made.* But these are the indispensable conditions. If zeal for the Lord no longer exists, if holiness—both as to external separation and *practical life*, and the first is utterly useless without the last—ceases to be the prevailing characteristic; if the word of truth is no longer rightly divided; and if mere external correctness remains without the living power of the Spirit, then God has no longer any use for such a company.

An idea seems sometimes to prevail that a company once connected with the testimony of God must always be so. Is, not history opposed to such an assumption? God’s testimony was connected with Israel, but they failed, and power and dominion were transferred to the Gentiles. God spared not the natural branches of the olive tree; and as to the vineyard it was given to others. Yet no one could have been more distinctly connected with God’s testimony on earth than Israel. The apostle Paul, speaking of them in this connection, says “To whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises: whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came.” Why then, if so closely bound up with the whole testimony of God, were they

rejected? *Simply because they themselves were not in accord with the testimony committed to them.* It is quite true they *had* all the Apostle enumerates, as mentioned above, but with God it is not what persons have in an outward way, but what they *are*, and what they *do* that make them acceptable to Him. The same Apostle deals with this very point in the second chapter of his epistle to the Romans, commencing verse 17. "Behold thou art called a Jew," he says; but what value is there in simply being *called* a Jew; "And *restest* in the law," he does not say they kept it; "and makest thy *boast* of God," does not say they glorified Him; "and *knowest* His will," not that they were formed by it. And he can go so far as to say of them that they "tried the things that differ"; they were fond of discussing modes of ritual and questions of conscience. And, moreover, accompanying all this worthless formality, there was the self-confidence that made them think that they were "guides of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law." Is it any wonder the Apostle sums all up by saying, "He is not a Jew which is one *outwardly*; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one *inwardly*; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." Therefore, while it is quite true that God does connect His testimony with a company, yet for that very reason, if the company ceases to be in keeping with the testimony, he divorces them. The same thing has been repeated in the history of the church; and if the whole has failed, certainly a fragment may.

Such a company is sure to be put to the proof. If God confers any grace upon them, the testing time will inevitably come. How well we know it has come. What siftings there have been. Does not our experience correspond with Levi's "Whom Thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom Thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah." But God has one end in all this, viz.: that we may be "partakers of His holiness." But to reach this point there must be exercise. There will be this result now for any who are exercised as to the state of things in the church of God. It would appear as if only the tribe of Levi were exercised as to what occurred at Massah and Meribah, for Moses mentions it especially in connection with them. All Israel passed through the same testing but apparently unaffected by it. What loss to them! What gain to Levi, for Moses can speak of them as God's "holy one."

We have seen that what will characterize any company God owns to-day will be that they will have His mind, just as the Thummim and Urim were with Levi. There will not be a correspondence, of course, as to the mere letter of the thing, we only refer *to* the principle. They will have His mind as revealed in the scriptures, and no doubt receive guidance in waiting upon Him as to the application of it to the circumstances and difficulties of the time. We have also seen the character of those to whom the Lord vouchsafes such communications, viz.: They must be holy; they do not despise the chastening of the Lord, but are exercised thereby; they recognise the Lord's claims to be first; father, mother, brethren and children come second. Lastly, God's word is observed, and His covenant kept (see 5: 8-9). What holy fear should be produced by the bare thought of even the possibility of belonging to such a company—and what humility of mind. Especially when we consider what are the demands, what obedience, what exercise, yea even to rise superior to nature.

Two other points now claim our attention in connection with the blessing of Levi. We have seen the state necessary in those to whom God would communicate His mind; we are now

directed to what they had to do. There is a moral order in this from which there can be no deviation. The right state must come first. The modern doctrine of “Do as I say, but not as I do,” finds no countenance in scripture. Levi had a two-fold mission. “They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy law” this was one part of it; the other, “They shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar.”

It will be patent to all that only those who bore the character descriptive of Levi could be charged with teaching Jacob His judgments, and Israel His law. Had Levi not borne a holy character; had they not been proved and tested; had they not observed God’s word for themselves and kept His covenant—they could never have been entrusted with the privilege and responsibility of teaching others. Do we not see, therefore, how remarkable is their blessing, and how wonderful the combination of its parts? In principle it cannot be otherwise today. To answer to God’s mind, to be in accord with His will, to respond to His claims, and then to teach others to do the same, this is what God looks for from any company He will recognise. A point of great moment is seen in the fact that Levi was commissioned to teach Israel. They did not exist simply for their own sake. This is a principle that seems to operate everywhere, whether in the natural or spiritual world. Nothing exists merely for itself. In heaven, on earth, in the sea, everything that has being has a purpose to fulfil in regard to something else. Sun, moon and stars all obey this principle. The earth with its teeming life, brings forth herb for the service of man, and ministers to his wants in numberless ways—and even man himself is subservient to the same law, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” It cannot be otherwise in spiritual matters; and accordingly we find this very principle exemplified in the case of Levi; “They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy law.”

How important it is to bear this principle in mind, for there is one inevitable result of disobeying it. Whatsoever, or whosoever, fails to fulfil it, perishes. Whether it is an animal failing to fulfil all the functions for which its body was designed, or man who was created for still higher ends, or a company which God may have raised up for a special purpose, as sure as ever it begins to exist solely for itself, it must, it will, perish. No one can evade this law. They may appear to for a time, but they cannot eventually, however slowly the retribution may come. It is a part of the all-pervading order of the moral and physical universe. As soon as ever the salt loses its power to season something else, it is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.

It would be very blessed to belong to a company answering, in some measure at all events, to the first part of Levi’s blessing. Nothing could be more important of itself, but what is now under consideration is equally so. *A company that has God’s mind must impart it.* God does not give light *merely* for its own sake. It is blessed to be separate from what is opposed to God, and equally blessed to be here for God; but to be here for God means being here for others. If we receive we must give, and this is the one condition of receiving more; “with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you.”

Moreover, there was no limitation put upon Levi’s service in this respect. It was not merely to those who were willing to come to them. No stipulation of this kind was made. Nor was it merely to certain tribes, but the whole of Israel. “They shall teach *Jacob* Thy judgments, and *Israel* Thy law.” This was a God-given commission; Levi did not take it upon themselves. Long

afterwards a wider one was given when the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead and about to ascend into the highest heaven, said to His disciples. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." In whatsoever way this commission may be regarded, it must be admitted the church has miserably failed to give effect to it, and is now so demoralized herself as to be unable to.¹ While giving all heed to the carrying out of this commission, or the corresponding one in Luke xxiv, we must not overlook the claim the entire church has upon those to whom God may have given light. "Let them teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy law."

There is a danger in the path of separation of becoming too much isolated. Levi was separated from all the other tribes but only in relation to all; they ever retained their place in Israel, and were never wholly disconnected, and no company to-day can afford either to assume the place of, or disconnect itself from, the church of God. A company that seeks to be here for God will never have less than "all saints" in view; will be free from all party spirit whether in regard to what is within or without, and will have a deeper sense than any of the ruined state of things, *and as forming part of it*. To them, the reproach of God's assembly will be a burden. A certain amount of isolation there must be, but it should be of that character in spiritual things that is represented in natural things by the country in which we live. England is isolated in regard to other nations by her natural position, but she is in touch with every quarter of the world.²

In order to teach God's judgments and His law, it was necessary for Levi to know them. It cannot be otherwise, of course, to-day. And in regard to the testimony to which reference has been made, God did give wonderful light concerning His truth. Books were written, some dealing with parts of the Bible, others even with the whole of it, while in tracts and pamphlets every important truth in scripture was discussed in a way which had been unknown for centuries. Such were distributed far and near, and no doubt much good resulted. The majority of those who were thus used have passed off the scene. That they were "taught of God" and not of man, and that the whole scope of the truth, as to its main features, was clearly grasped by them, few, who enjoyed their living ministry or have studied their writings, have any doubt. One thing is perfectly clear, that what was truth then is truth now, and nothing can alter it. The form under which truth is presented may alter; the substance never. Is it not necessary to remind ourselves of this at the present moment? Far be it from any to contend for a lifeless creed, or be satisfied with mere dry bones of theology, from which the warm flesh and living breath have long been absent. Dry dust, however ancient, is of no use to anyone. We want the wells of truth from which rise living springs. But, be it remembered the wells that Isaac's servants digged (according to the twenty-sixth chapter of Genesis), were the same wells that had been digged in the days of Abraham, *and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them*. The truth always is the truth, but it needs to be held in the living power of Spirit. Accordingly, in connection with the unstopping of Abraham's wells we find Isaac's servants found a well of springing (or living) water. This we may take as a figure of the Holy Spirit. If there is no hindrance to the Spirit, the people of God will never lack refreshment. The scriptures contain all truth, but that truth needs the illuminating power of the Spirit. It is quite possible for truth to be developed, and for fresh light to break from it. At the same time we do need to continue in the things which we have learned and *been assured of*, knowing of

WHOM we have learned them, otherwise how can the principle we are considering be carried out? Levi must have learned and been assured of God's judgments, and His law, in order to teach Israel. No company on earth could have a greater honour conferred upon it than that of being enabled to do this to-day. How much is it being done? That something of this kind is attempted by valued servants of the Lord is gladly acknowledged. But might not a great deal more be done by circulating literature and holding meetings? In the face of all the error that is abroad, those who know the truth have a tremendous responsibility. Shall error find many champions, and truth so few? There are men ready to cross land and sea to propagate some fancy, or theory, of their own, be it ever so vain. Are those who have truth more precious than gold of Ophir to sit by with indifference?

Levi had yet another mission, one higher and more important than even the other. "They shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar." This was the peculiar privilege of the priestly family. While all Christians are priests to-day, yet comparatively few exercise their priestly functions. The peculiar mark of a company here for God will be that they will, with more or less intelligence, enter into this high privilege. The other privilege we have been considering was manward, this is Godward. To maintain the proper balance between these two is one of the great needs of the hour. There is a danger sometimes of making everything of service manward, at other times an equal danger of making everything of service Godward. We are creatures of extremes. There is no real conflict between* the two. Service to man and service to God each has its place. There is no reason why in our day they should not go hand in hand, as they did in Levi's day. "They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy law," here is the one line of service; "they shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar," here is the other. We commend these two things to all who love God and His people.

And what is it to put incense before God? To answer this question properly we must first say a little about the incense itself. We get the details of its composition given us in Exodus 30: 34-38, and we have no doubt it sets forth the personal and moral perfections of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was composed of sweet spices with pure frankincense. There was a fragrance and sweetness about everything Christ did, because His own inherent excellence lent virtue to every act. Of the sweet spices it says, "Of each shall there be a like weight." In the Lord Jesus there was no undue preponderance of any quality. Love and holiness; faithfulness and tenderness; rebuke and encouragement, were ever in due proportion. He knew when to rebuke Peter; He knew also when to turn and look upon him. He would not grant the request of the Pharisees for a sign; and yet He would meet the unbelief of Thomas by showing, him His hands and side. He would not condemn the woman (John 8), and yet He said, "Go, and sin no more." It was this combination that was so wonderful; such strength and humility, such majesty and meekness; such unsullied purity and yet a depth of compassion to which none appealed in vain. What perfume arose to heaven as He went about doing good. And this is what the incense was to be, "A perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary.*" If this was manifest all through the life of the Lord Jesus, it was still more conspicuous during its last hours, and on the cross. At one moment He is asking His disciples to watch with Him; at the next He will not allow the daughters of Jerusalem to weep for Him. At a moment when naturally one would have thought a little sympathy would have cheered Him more than anything, He rises above it and extends sympathy to those who proffered it. And when on the

cross He is tested to the greatest degree, undergoing every indignity and insult, and bearing every calamity within the range of possibility, He finds it an occasion to breathe out a prayer for His enemies, an opportunity to bring the dawn of heaven to a malefactor's soul, and a moment when in restful tranquility He can commit His Spirit to His Father's keeping.

This incense was "tempered together pure and holy." So was everything in connection with the life of our blessed Lord. His speech was always with grace seasoned with salt; or contrariwise, if angry, His anger was tempered with grief (see Mark 3:5.) Some of it was to be beaten very small and put before the testimony in the tabernacle. From this we learn that down to the smallest detail of the life of Christ there was just the same perfection. Whether in His home at Nazareth, or accomplishing the mighty work of redemption all was done under the eye of God, and all was equally excellent. The beating some of it "very small," may be also taken in another way. Christ was made small in the eyes of men. He was despised and rejected. He was "beaten small" but the testing that brought Him thus low only intensified the fragrance of the incense that went up to God. In treading the path of God's will, he became smaller and smaller in the estimation of man. He was found in fashion as a man, but this was not all—He humbled Himself. Nor was this all—He became obedient unto death; *even* the death of the cross. And from that cross ascended one vast cloud of incense. How small He became there His own language tells us, "I am a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see Me laugh Me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him." All this actually occurred. He was brought into the dust of death. But from that dust the incense of all that He was went up to God, and the more He was beaten small, the richer it grew.

Could any company desire a greater privilege than that of putting incense before God? To be so filled with a sense of the personal and moral perfections of Christ that the heart overflows in adoration and worship. That God wants such a company to-day there can be no doubt, for "the Father seeketh such to worship Him." It is needful to remark, that it is only in the power of the Spirit it can be done. There are those calling themselves Christians who would burn material incense; this is only an abomination. But we have to remember likewise that the true incense cannot be offered by any mere knowledge of doctrine, command of language, or effort of will. We must be taught and led of the Spirit; and Christ must command the affections and admiration of the whole spiritual man. It is remarkable that in the Old Testament what is typical of the Holy Spirit is frequently presented in conjunction with the incense. Two examples of this occur in Exodus 30. The directions as to making the holy anointing oil immediately precede the directions as to the incense. And at the beginning of the same chapter we find that Aaron was instructed to burn incense upon the golden altar every time he dressed the lamps, or lighted them; showing the close connection between the incense and the oil, and indicating that all testimony for God in the power of the Spirit depends upon the appreciation of Christ, as well as the fact that all depends upon Christ's intercession. While Christ lives in the presence of God, there will always be a testimony on earth.

We now arrive at the last part of Levi's service; not only were they to put incense before God, but whole burnt sacrifice upon His altar. The burnt offering was the basis of everything. In the order of the offerings as given in Leviticus it comes first, because it represents what God

found for Himself in the One who died on the cross of Calvary. There Christ gave to God that which He had never had before. How acceptable He was at that moment none but God will ever know, for the act was more wonderful even than when He created the worlds for God's pleasure. The bearing of sin became the occasion not for the exercise of power, but for the expression of that love which the Son had to the Father. The love was ever there, but at the cross the fountain was opened and the deep treasures of the love of that heart were displayed. If the fountains of the great deep were broken up in judgment at the flood, the fountains of a still greater deep were opened up in grace at the cross. All that obedience and devoted-ness could do was done there. As He himself expressed it, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do." Satan had nothing in Him. Nothing! There was no room for anything upon which Satan could act. Love to God and the determination to do His will filled that heart and left it without a vacant crevice.

And all this, too, with the full knowledge of what was required of Him. It was not an ecstasy that would die out when all that was expected from Him became known. He knew all, and before ever He came into the world He surrendered Himself to accomplish all. If the reader will turn to Leviticus 3: 8, he will find the parts, the head and the fat placed together and mentioned separately from the others. In the head we have indicated the divine intelligence of all that was demanded of Him, and in the fat the energy and excellence that could meet it. Both were found in Christ. Then we have the inwards and the legs washed in water, showing that everything was done in obedience to the word of God, as well as there being nothing inwardly, or outwardly, contrary to that word. As He could say before He offered Himself, "I do always those things that please Him," and again, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him."

This is not the opportunity for going fully into the burnt offering, but any company that is to serve God acceptably must be intimate with its meaning, and form a right estimate of its value. To overlook such a subject and think it obsolete would be disastrous indeed. We can never afford to leave the foundations. To get out of touch with them would be as dangerous as for an army to lose touch with its base. This fact is illustrated in a remarkable way by the sad judgment that befel Nadab and Abihu. We read, "They took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord." Mark, it does not say they offered strange incense, but strange fire; that is, the fire was not taken from off the altar of burnt offering. In other words, they did not keep in touch with their base. They forgot that the foundation of everything was in the burnt offering, and although they were undoubtedly true priests, and no one could have disputed their title in that respect, and they had censers and incense, yet death overtook them. Let us learn a lesson from this solemn fact, and ever keep in touch with the base; for the base connects us with the summit. There was a connecting link between the altar of burnt offering and the holiest. It was the fire. The incense was carried into the holiest and the cloud covered the mercy seat, but the fire in the censer that produced the cloud and filled the holiest with fragrance was off the altar of burnt offering. No other would do.

We thus learn that the burnt offering and incense were very closely associated. The incense reminds us of the personal and moral excellencies of Christ, and the burnt offering that His

death brought them all out. In fact, the very word used for burn in the original, in the case of the burnt offering, is a different word to that used in speaking of the sin offering, and has the force of ascending up like the burning of incense. In the burnt offering all ascended to God as a sweet savour. It was a question of the excellence of the victim. As we think of all that Christ gave to God at that moment when He poured out His soul unto death—the love, the obedience, the devotedness, as well as His personal excellence—how precious to be able to enter into it, and in company with other believers, present these things to God. Oh, that there may be a company to-day to do as Levi did—“They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy law; they shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar.”

Such a company will, like Levi, receive God’s blessing. “Bless Lord His substance, and accept the work of His hands.” If God blesses and approves, all else matters little. He will not allow any enemy to triumph. As was said long ago to the church in Philadelphia, “Behold, I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it, for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name.” It matters not how little the strength or how few the numbers. It matters everything whether the characteristics of Levi are present or absent. Levi was numerically by far the smallest of all the tribes. When all the males from *twenty years old and upward* were numbered we find that Manasseh, the smallest, possessed of such thirty and two thousand and two hundred, whereas we learn from Numbers 3: 39, that in the tribe of Levi all the males from a *month old* and upward were only twenty and two thousand. What an instance of God’s grace to select the least conspicuous for the most exalted place. What an illustration of the text, “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty “ (1Cor 1: 27). And what for? “That no flesh should glory in His presence,” but, “he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord.” This is just what we are in such danger of forgetting. But this is just why God chooses the weak and foolish and base, that they may be conscious that it is not by their own power or holiness that they have done this, and that they may learn to admire the grace of God. As soon as ever a company or an individual loses the sense that all is of grace, as soon as they forget who it is made them to differ from others, they are moving on the downward road that can only end in Laodicean assumption and indifference.

What we learn then from Levi’s blessing is that any company that is to be here for God to-day must seek (though in the utmost humility and dependence) to fill the place that Levi filled in Israel. None, of course, can fill such a place apart from the grace of God. What will mark such a company will be, as we have seen, that they will have the mind of God, but only as answering to the character of God. “Let Thy Thummim and Thy Urim be with Thy holy one.” Their continual exercise before God, will be a mark that He is recognising them and dealing with them— “Whom Thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom Thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah.” They will be here absolutely for God, above every other consideration whenever God’s rights are invaded—“Who said unto his father, and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children.” They will make God’s word their law—“They have observed Thy word and kept Thy covenant.” And to such a company will be granted the inestimable privilege of serving God in a double capacity—“They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy law; they shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar.”

Footnotes

[1] i.e.. To its full extent.

[2] This illustration must not be carried too far.